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LECTURES ON LITERATURE  
AND ART.





THE  
AFTERNOON LECTURES ON  
LITERATURE AND ART.

DELIVERED IN THE THEATRE OF THE MUSEUM OF  
INDUSTRY, S. STEPHEN'S GREEN, DUBLIN,  
IN APRIL AND MAY, 1866.



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AFTERNOON LECTURES ON  
LITERATURE AND ART.

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## P R E F A C E.

**T**HE fourth annual volume published by the Committee contains the "Afternoon Lectures" delivered during the months of April and May, 1866, in the Museum of Irish Industry, S. Stephen's Green, Dublin.

It is hoped that in this form the Lectures will be welcomed by many to whom the Committee, from want of room, were obliged to refuse admittance to the Lecture-hall.

The Committee have again to acknowledge their obligations to Sir Robert Kane and the authorities of the Department of Science and

Art, for the use of the Museum of Irish Industry,  
and to offer their thanks to the several gentlemen who contributed Lectures to the Course of 1866.

ROBERT H. MARTLEY, }  
R. DENNY URLIN, } *Hon. Secs.*

March, 1867.



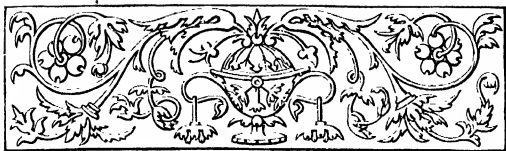
ARCHITECTURE IN THE THIRTEENTH  
CENTURY.

BY GEORGE EDMUND STREET, A.R.A.

DIOCESAN ARCHITECT FOR THE DIOCESES OF  
YORK AND OXFORD.







## ARCHITECTURE IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY.

**T**HE time has passed, fortunately, when it was necessary to apologize to an audience before one ventured to trouble them with anything about the noblest of all arts—that of Architecture. Everywhere men discuss it, study its history with more or less care, and dispute eagerly the question of style. Everywhere it is the fashion to have a taste, to pronounce in a decided way on the merits of new buildings, and, in short, to recognize the position of architecture as a fine art.

Your own programme, almost as a matter of course, contains from time to time a lecture devoted to this subject, and it was impossible for me not to feel, when appealed to by your committee to undertake one of this year's course of lectures, that to refuse would be to throw away a great opportunity of advocating a cause which I have very much at heart, to which I have vowed the allegiance of a lifetime of hearty labour, and in aid of which I am always anxious to enlist the sympathy of

every one upon whose opinions I can in any way exert any influence. When asked, therefore, I could but obey the summons ; and in begging you to give me your attention this afternoon, I do so in the hope that I may be able to enlist your sympathies in the cause which commands my own, to make those of you who are not so already, enthusiastic about thirteenth century art, and to promote, in some degree, its accurate revival among you at the present day. Nor is this a useless task that I set myself ; for you must pardon my saying that, so far as an ordinary traveller can judge, the study of Christian art has been much less enthusiastically pursued here than it has in England. There, on all sides, some evidence is to be found, not only of enthusiasm for, but also of knowledge of, the best forms of Christian art. To this various causes have led. The great religious revival, which has made England *the* church-building country *par excellence* of this century, has of course largely conduced to it. On all hands we have architects who make mediæval art the study of their lives, and they are supported and urged on everywhere not only by individuals, but also by societies the sole object of which is the study and elucidation of our national antiquities, and, of course, chiefly of our ancient ecclesiastical architecture. Of such societies you, no doubt, can afford examples in this and in some other localities ; and I trust the time is not far distant when we may see both individuals and societies even more zealous and more active here than they are in England. To assist in this work is my special object to-day, and I think I shall best do so by narrowing my remarks

to the consideration of thirteenth century art alone ; and for this reason :—I notice everywhere that, though educated men generally have a fair knowledge as to the facts of architecture, that is to say, as to the styles in vogue at various periods, and the history of the rise and fall of the various styles, they very rarely attempt to exercise their critical faculties, or to form any definite opinion as to why one building is admirable, another blameable, one noticeable for the perfection of the art displayed in it, another for the imperfection. It is impossible to doubt that the exercise of active criticism is essential to the healthy progress of all the arts. Without it the artist falls asleep, makes no progress, and finally becomes uninterested in his work. With it each appreciative criticism spurs him on to fresh efforts, and his work is of necessity a continual advance. Now this sort of criticism is impossible if attempted with nothing but a dry knowledge of the history of architecture ; it has no life in it, no power of affecting the artist. For this it is necessary that the critic should have mastered the artistic principles developed in the style to which he attaches himself, and be able to define and distinguish clearly what is right and what is wrong in each, and so to appreciate the subtle difference between work which marks the great artist, and that which only shows the patient truthful workman.

It is far too much the custom to assume that all ancient art was equally good ; that men wrought under such rules, possessed such traditions, and adhered so carefully to the same grooves or channels in art, that there is no choice to be made between the works of one



old architect and another, all being equally admirable and equally deserving of our imitation. If this *were* so, we should be obliged at once to wipe out architecture from the list of the fine arts altogether; knowing this very well, that no art can be practised under such conditions, and that without personality and individuality of character, no artist—whether painter, sculptor, or architect—can ever impress any great and lasting value on his work.

It is then with this higher view than the merely historical aspect of the case that I ask for attention this afternoon. I wish to bring before you the architecture of the thirteenth century, not by way of an historical essay, but as claiming and deserving the admiration of all artists; and I desire to point out the fount and origin of this merit in the buildings in question as lying in the artistic power and refinement which distinguish them. No theme can be more noble, or, as it seems to me, more inspiring. If there be one century since the birth of our Lord which transcends and excels every other it is certainly the thirteenth. It was then that the root of all that is greatest in Christian art was struck; men's lives and manners were generally simple and natural; the age of Dante found men able and willing to appreciate those poetical thoughts which run through all noble art; and just as that great man did more for the world of letters—for civilization in fact—than any other layman during the Christian era, so the century which saw his birth seems to be that from which all modern art of every kind is to be dated. It was the century not only of Dante, but of Giotto, of Cimabue, of Niccola Pisano; that in which the great mendicant orders were founded—

that of St. Dominic in 1216, and that of St. Francis in 1223, to whose energy, and to the enthusiasm with which they were received at the time as Reformers, we owe so much of the noblest architecture of the period; it was the period of the greatest power of the Popes and of the Church; the age to which England owes such churches as those of Salisbury, Wells, Lincoln, Chichester, Whitby, Rievaulx, and Fountains; to which Ireland owes St. Patrick's and Kilkenny cathedrals; and France a long series of unsurpassable buildings, which it were tedious to enumerate at length. At this time, too, trade was pursued with singular energy. Then it was that the great Italian republics of Pisa, Genoa, and Venice, rose to power, and formed settlements at Constantinople, Acre, and other cities in Syria and Egypt, which led directly to the importation of all that was most valuable in Eastern art and manufactures. Then, too, the increasing wealth of the rest of Europe, whether derived from internal improvement or from foreign commerce, displayed itself in more expensive consumption, and greater refinement of domestic life. These effects had been gradual, but in the latter half of this century appear to have received an accelerated impulse. France had profited much by the just government of St. Louis; England followed the example she set; and in Italy, the progress of the republics was generally one from rude simplicity to the utmost refinement. An Italian writer of the end of the century, speaking of the state of things a hundred years before, says, "In those times the manners of the Italians were rude—a man and his wife eat off the same plate. There were

no wooden-handled knives, nor more than one or two drinking cups in a house. Candles of wax or tallow were unknown. The clothes of men were of leather, unlined; the dress of women, even after marriage, was simple. But now," he goes on, "frugality has been changed to sumptuousness; everything exquisite is sought after in dress—gold, silver, pearls, silks, and rich furs, foreign wines, and rich meats are required;" and so on: so that the whole period was one of transition from simplicity to refinement, and just that in which a great development of art might fairly be expected. It is true, indeed, that the art of the thirteenth century was developed, as all real art must be, from that which had preceded it. But there is much more difference between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in art than there is between any others in the middle ages: for whilst the art of the former was archaic, rude, and merely founded on traditions of Roman works, that of the latter contained, beyond question, the germ of all that was noble and beautiful in European art for some centuries.

The Romanesque architecture of the twelfth century was in many respects full of magnificent sentiment, and grand and dignified character. The ornamentation was legitimately architectural, rich and gorgeous to excess very often, but always striking in its effect, and seldom, even when most adorned, oppressing the eye with a sense of over-enrichment. The whole idea of the Norman builders was to build as solidly as was possible; they were admirable masons, wrought their stone with much care, and set it so well in the wall, that their

work still often outlasts that of the men who came long after them. In course of time they began to cover their buildings with stone vaulting; and there can be little doubt that it was in the course of solving the questions which naturally presented themselves in attempting to erect these vaults, that the advantage of using the pointed arch was first seen. Once discovered, once used, it was impossible to ignore its *convenience*; though it is curious to observe, that, for a considerable period, the superior *beauty* of the pointed arch was not realized, and, consequently, in transitional works about the end of the twelfth century, it is constantly seen used for all the places where its form and strength made it convenient, whilst the semicircular arch was still retained whenever mere ornament was thought of. It was impossible, however, that this should long continue to be the case. The Norman buildings were almost always constructed with walls of enormous thickness, uniform throughout their extent; the arches, of no great width, exerted but little thrust on the walls; and, consequently, there was no necessity for buttresses, and the general effect was one of stable immovability. With the introduction of the pointed arch all their features were of necessity changed, and this almost immediately. The pointed arch exerted a thrust which required counteraction, hence came the buttress, simple at first, but developed afterwards—as men became more daring in their attempts—into all those marvellously skilful schemes for resisting the thrust of groining and the like, in the shape of flying buttresses, which always impress so much the least educated beholder, and to which so much of

the character of life, vigour, and mobility which marks the pointed style is owing. The Romanesque and Norman buildings were essentially works of rest and repose; whilst the early Gothic were just as decidedly works of action and life. In the Norman buildings there is nothing that suggests the least necessity for support, or the least attempt to economize material by concentrating weights and forces at given points; in the Gothic buildings, on the contrary, every part does so. From the apex of the gable down to the lowest course of the plinth, there is everywhere a sign of thrust and pressure met and counteracted by the skilful counterpoise of buttress, pier, and pinnacle; and the whole work became almost at once as full of evidence of skill as older works had been of honest simplicity. The natural results soon ensued. Masons and architects had been skilful in execution before, they had carved elaborate enrichments, and had spared no labour in the detail of their work; but it all wanted the ennobling presence of scientific power, and herein it lacked also that refinement which is sure to accompany this; and within a few years, the same men and their immediate successors are found everywhere executing works under the influence of the new ideas which the new style fostered, the great and invariable features of which are the refinement and delicacy which distinguish them.

Of course, in venturing to treat so large a subject as that which I have undertaken, it would be quite impossible to do more than glance at the general characteristics of the style during the century in various countries. To do more than this, would be to write the history of

European art : but less than this would not be possible, if I am to treat the subject properly. Let me now, therefore, ask your attention whilst I point out some of the national variations of architecture which led up to, or were contemporary with, those which most of us know pretty well, here, and in England.

The ground-plan is the first part of a building to be examined ; and confining ourselves, at any rate, for the present, to ecclesiastical examples, we shall find that everywhere the ground-plans of the twelfth century owed their origin to Byzantine influence as in such churches as St. Mark's at Venice, or to Romanesque influence as in the Roman Basilica, converted into a church, and then copied in spite of its history. The former plan was symbolical, with a central dome, and a cruciform arrangement of nave, transepts, and choir ; whilst the latter was simply practical and useful, and a good meeting place for people for religious as well as for secular purposes. The steps were many by which these two plans were gradually fused and developed into the perfect French thirteenth-century ground-plan. One of the most suggestive of them is to be seen, no doubt, in the churches of the Puy de Dome, where with the simple nave and aisles recalling the Basilica, we see the Byzantine central lantern, the transepts, and, finally, the apsidal east end, with its surrounding aisle, and a range of chapels projecting from the latter. Here everything is simple and austere ; the round arch only is used, and it requires some consideration to detect in it what one may, nevertheless, pronounce to be the first type of the very best French Gothic. Go from these

early churches of the Puy de Dome to Bourges, and so to Paris, Chartres, or Rouen, and you will find the same general scheme translated, so to speak, into Gothic; clusters of columns take the place of simple shafts, their capitals are exuberantly sculptured, the roofs are vaulted with pointed vaults of stone, the windows are delicately designed with geometrical traceries, and the arrangements of all the constructive features are made with the most consummate art and care. It is well to pause on this type of plan for a time, because for some reason it was never extensively employed in England, where there was a decided prejudice against the apsidal termination to a church after the end of the twelfth century. You will correct me if necessary, but I believe that to some extent we owe this prejudice to the influence of the Irish Church, which from the first adopted the square east end. Otherwise, in most respects, the English churches are more varied in plan than the French; and one possible reason is, that from the early part of the thirteenth century, the French, wherever it was possible, groined their churches in stone, whilst the English almost as invariably covered theirs with timber roofs. The former required, of course, much more careful arrangement of the plan, in order to give the required points of support, and the necessary buttresses; the latter led to greater variety of outline, and to a less formal and scientific style of design. The architect was able to wander at will over the whole field of art, to vary the outline of his building wherever he listed, and to make changes in the disposition of the piers, and other main supports of his

building, which were quite impossible when the building was to be groined in stone.

England possesses a store of buildings of the thirteenth century second only to those of which France can boast. There is a perfect symmetry about the plans of the greater churches, such as Salisbury, Wells, or Lincoln, which cannot be surpassed elsewhere; and though they are on a less ambitious scale than some of the great French churches, they amply atone for any such deficiency by the greater delicacy of the detail, and the intricacy of the subordinate parts. Few can be ignorant of the great English abbeys, many of which were founded in this century, and of which in one county alone we possess a series of examples, which, by themselves, would suffice to make the claims of England, as one of the fountain-heads of art in this century, quite indisputable. I need hardly say that I refer to Yorkshire. Here, in the thirteenth century, there existed a school of architects of the most consummate power and genius, whose works are so numerous, so equal in style, and so noble, that I cannot help supposing that they obeyed very closely the directions and inspirations of some two or three great leaders. Their work is remarkable not only for the stateliness which generally marks works of the same age, but for a refinement and yet abundance of detail, which can scarcely be matched elsewhere. The mouldings are invariably first rate, and oftentimes designed with extreme boldness. There is no English work which, in power and simplicity of scheme, has so much affinity to the noblest Greek work as this. The one feature in which



it is possible to notice a deficiency in the sculpture ; that of foliage is rare, that of figures scarcely exists at all. But, in spite of feeling, as I do, that the noblest architecture requires the addition of sculpture for its perfect development, one cannot help feeling grateful to these Yorkshire architects for the proof which they have left us that it is possible to reach almost the highest attainable standard without the use of any means beyond those which are absolutely within the reach of every architect.

Lincoln cathedral is, perhaps, the church which, more than any other, enables us to realize the highest merits of English art ; for there, not only are the architectural details admirable, but their beauty is enhanced by a profusion of sculpture of the most glorious kind, and of human figures, as well as of foliage. But you must not imagine that it is only in great abbeys and cathedrals that the age was so fertile. On the contrary, little village churches in all parts of the land illustrate the same possession of power on the part of the country architect or mason that we see in those who built the former. I know no examples more interesting than these, whether you take the Sussex village church, with its intensely simple lancet windows, its coved wooden roof, and its shingle spire ; or whether the Northamptonshire churches, built of good stone, with much rich decoration in their detail, and adorned with towers and spires, which are the pride of the whole country ; in all you will find the same extraordinary equality in detail and harmony in character. They bring before us the especial glory of England—the small village church—in perfection ; and there is one

feature in them which one may almost say is unsurpassed elsewhere. This is the steeple. Usually it is placed at the west end of the church, and surmounted by a spire. The outline of this is always of the most severe kind: an octagon placed on the square tower, with very simple spire-lights on the cardinal sides only, and a steep slope, and sometimes small pinnacles connecting the octagonal base of the spire with the square outline of the tower. Here, as in most works of the period, the effort seems to have been to obtain as simple and graceful an outline as possible, and to construct the work so that there should be as few elements of decay in it as might be. In later times, though the early broach spire was sometimes copied, it was much more usual to add parapets, flying buttresses, and complicated pinnacles at the base of the spire, and thus at the same time to destroy the simplicity, and diminish the stability of the work. The history of our village churches is of course involved in much more obscurity than is that of our cathedrals. We know but little, indeed, as to the architects or the builders of the latter, but nothing at all as to those of the former. And though an occasional reference may be found to some one man now and then in Italy, Spain, and France, it is after all only a conjectural result at which one can arrive as to their condition or character.

The balance of testimony does, however, appear to me to be against the old assumption that our thirteenth-century architects were clerics, or Freemasons, in the modern sense of the word, as members of a secret society. They were apparently very unlike artists of this

day in their position—probably nearer the workman, and generally engaged as builders or sculptors on the works which they directed. If this be so, it makes the artistic value of most of their works the more surprising, though, at the same time, the more satisfactory, because it shows that the undeviating habit of acting upon simple rules of common sense and honesty in design, ornament, and construction, involves as a certainty the execution of work which never falls below a certain standard. We see the same thing in the works of people uncontaminated by European civilization to the present day. The products of Persia, or of Japan, are almost all good, their design natural and beautiful, and their colouring exquisite; but the workmen who produce these results do so by the simple plan of following old rules, and never condescending to anything like a deception or equivocation in design.

Let me now ask you to consider the comparative claims of our national art, and that of other countries in the thirteenth century. Such a comparison must, I think, on the whole, result in a verdict in favour of the former. And this, not because the English architects were the more scientific or the bolder men, but because they were the more truly poetical in their work, more essentially possessed of the feelings of artists. The great French artists were consummate masters of their craft. They essayed the most daring contrivances for producing effect. They went, not only near to the limits of what was possible, but often beyond them, so that catastrophes in the works they undertook were not unfrequent. One example will suffice to illustrate

this statement. Such a church as the cathedral at Amiens might, one would have supposed, have satisfied any one; but it was no sooner accomplished than the people at Beauvais encouraged their architect to design a church which should be loftier, lighter, and altogether more daring in its construction; the result was that the work fell, and had to be rebuilt on more prosaic and sensible plans. But the feeling which such an effort shows, seems to me not to have existed here, and to have had a great deal of that love of show, that passion for rivalry, which are such decided marks of our own age, and so much opposed to the highest artistic feeling. This was never more truly possessed by any artists than our own. There seems to me to be in their works nothing beyond the desire to do the work they had to do in the simplest and most natural manner possible. They had the most intense sense of beauty of form and proportion, great feeling for slender, graceful work, whenever it was possible, and at the same time an honest desire never to exceed the limits of safe construction. As masons in the merely technical sense of the term, they were inferior probably to the French, but as carpenters they had no rivals. It is true that the most magnificent works in wood are not of this century; but enough was done to pave the way for the later works, and the detail of the early wood-work, as we still see it in such works as the stalls of Winchester Cathedral, and other similar works, has never been excelled.

In other parts of Europe the architects of this age were certainly inferior to those of France and England. Germany, for instance, had accomplished great works

in the preceding century. The Romanesque churches on and near the Rhine were noble, solid, and grand; but they held their own far into the thirteenth century, so that genuine works of the same style as ours are much more rare there than elsewhere. When at last there was a change, it was in imitation and emulation of the French, who in the middle ages had an influence over their neighbours which we never possessed.

In Spain the case was somewhat similar. For, owing to the contests with the Moors, the Spaniards themselves had not much time to bestow on art; and as they obtained bishops from France, so those bishops undoubtedly brought with them their own architects, and introduced a distinctly French style of building. This is particularly seen in the cathedrals of Toledo, Burgos, and Leon. At the same time the Spaniards were also building cathedrals in an earlier style at various places, among which Tarragona, Lérida, and Tudela, are remarkable examples. In these last the walls retain all the solidity of Romanesque buildings, the pointed arch is used in a very severe manner, and the decorations are Romanesque in their formality, though exquisite in their detail. The whole effect of these examples is grave and impressive in the highest degree; and they must inspire every one who visits them with deep respect for their designers. At the same time their spirit is quite unlike that generally exhibited at the period, gravity taking the place of airiness, honest patience of daring, and reverence for old examples of anxiety to develope to the utmost the advantages secured by the introduction of the pointed arch.

In Italy the style is full of contradictions. The truth is that pointed architecture was always used there by men who had classic works more or less in their minds. There was not, therefore, the same singleness of mind and purpose that marked the artists of other countries, and in one particular, which rules everything else to a great extent—the arrangement of the ground-plan—they were certainly most unsuccessful. There is no church in Italy (excepting always the early Byzantine buildings) which is to be compared with northern examples in skilful and beautiful arrangement of the plan. The elevations are frequently clumsy and ill-contrived, the details do not fit together well, there was no sense of the iniquity of unreal or sham construction, and the one point on which men did feel strongly—the use of colour in construction and decoration—seems to have made them careless about all else. San Francesco at Assisi, or the church of Sta. Anastasia at Verona, may be instanced as examples of this style. The former built to receive some of the finest wall-paintings ever seen, the latter to be covered everywhere with constructed colour in marble, brick, or stone. There is, therefore, not so much affinity between art north and south of the Alps at any time, as between that of the northern nations at all times. Yet our ancestors quite recognized the beauty of some Italian work, and imported it occasionally, as we see in the mosaic pavements of Westminster Abbey and Canterbury Cathedral, and in the shrine of St. Edward the Confessor, in the former church.

I leave to the last the mention of the thirteenth century

works in your own country, partly because I do not feel that I know enough of them to justify me in attempting any generalization of their features. My knowledge of them is limited to those erected within the English pale, but these have features which have always made me class them among the most interesting that I know. It is not that they are works of art worthy of most attentive study, so much as the way in which they illustrate the manner in which art was carried from land to land in the middle ages, which interests me so much in them. The subject may or may not have been exhausted before, and if it has, I must beg pardon for referring to it. The feature in question is this: I find in these buildings the most unmistakeable marks of their having been erected by the same men who were engaged at the same time in England and Wales. They may be divided into two classes. Of the first, Christ Church Cathedral, in this city, and Kilkenny Cathedral, may be taken as illustrations. These two churches possess certain features so peculiar, and so exactly like what we see in parts of St. David's, Llandaff, and Wells Cathedrals, and Glastonbury Abbey, that they *must* have been executed by the same workmen, or from the designs of the same architect. The windows in the north aisle of Christ Church, the internal shafts of which are intersected by bands at very short intervals, are imitated closely in the north doorway of Kilkenny Cathedral, and in a doorway at Strata Florida Abbey, in South Wales. The detail of the mouldings of the beautiful columns in the north side of Christ Church, with the singular treatment of the sculptured capitals, has the

most curious similarity to the sculptured capitals of the nave arcades at St. David's, and to other capitals at Llandaff and Glastonbury; and in other respects the parallel holds good. These details are all so unlike work seen in other districts, and so evidently those of one school, that we may fairly state it as a fact, which does not require documentary evidence for its support, that these two great Irish churches owe their design to architects whose first works are seen in Glastonbury, and who spread thence into Wales, and thence, no doubt, with the English invaders into Ireland.

St. Patrick's, on the other hand, belongs, as it seems to me, to another school; and you must compare it with the early portions of Chester Cathedral, if you would learn whence its builders came. The points of similarity are such as it is difficult to explain by word of mouth in a lecture, and I must ask you, therefore, to take my statement of the fact for what it is worth only, and to compare the two churches for yourselves when the opportunity offers itself.

I know not how far you realize here the value of such works of art as St. Patrick's and Christ Church Cathedrals. If you can contrive, in the case of the latter church, to forget modern alterations, to see through whitewash, and to recover from the impression which its squalid look first of all produces, you will be able to realize that the design of the northern side of the nave is one of the most exquisite of its age. The beauty of the sculpture and of the mouldings is extreme, and the design of the triforium and clerestory really perfect. St. Patrick's never had any work quite so good as this,



and is now so far a new work that it does not offer the same advantages for study as Christ Church. But what a noble plan was it not, with its delicate Lady-chapel, its transepts with double aisles, and the fine mouldings and details with which the whole building abounded. And of cathedrals of a smaller scale, I know none which pleases me altogether more than that of Kilkenny, where with a happy art, though the scale is small, there is all the air of a cathedral as distinguished from a parish church, and a great deal of the most lovely detail.

I know how difficult it is for any one who, like myself, lives in what may be called a purely architectural atmosphere, to render himself entirely, if at all, intelligible to such an audience as that which I now address, when he comes to deal with those questions of detail which naturally arise on such a subject as this. But I must make the attempt, because the only mode in which it is at all possible to explain the beauties and principles of such work is by taking various features of detail, and explaining rapidly in what way they were developed during the period which we are considering. With this view let me ask you to give me your attention whilst I attempt, by taking in order a few such subdivisions of ancient work, as, e. g., the doorways, windows, mouldings, and sculpture, to explain in what way those of the thirteenth century were superior to others, and incidentally how they exhibit such an adherence to true principles of design and construction as are necessary in all work which aims at attaining the highest artistic rank.

There are no features in our old buildings which

strike the eye more than some of the doorways. But it is not until an English eye has become accustomed to foreign examples that it realizes how magnificent their effect may be. The great thirteenth-century portal may indeed almost be said to be a French invention; in the greater churches it assumes an amazing importance, and is so grand as sometimes to seem even exaggerated, though indeed this is far from being really the case. In a church nothing ought to be more obvious than the desire of the builder to bring in all who will come within the doors. If his door is small, obscure, difficult of access, the inference is that it is not of much use; and at Amiens, Bourges, Paris, Chartres, and the rest of those great examples, where the entire façade consists of a group of doorways, it is obvious that exactly the contrary of this was the inference that would be drawn by every one. It is impossible to imagine anything more glorious than these great works; so broad and dignified in their conception, so refined and delicate when necessary in their detail, so ably constructed, and so skilfully adorned with sculpture are they, that one returns to them for study, year after year, with increased and ever-increasing pleasure. Generally they have splayed jambs, in front of which stand alternately detached shafts and statues; the various members of the arch are sculptured with groups of angels, saints, and running enrichments of foliage, whilst the tympanum within the arch is reserved for the great central piece of sculpture which was to give the key to the whole story of the door. For these doorways had each their story; they formed the centre of that iconographic system of

decoration which has led men to speak of each great church as a Christian epic. And there was no lack of variety in the way in which the same kind of scheme was executed in different places. In the previous century it is true that the great French doorways were remarkable for their grandeur; but they were generally almost identical in their design, and did no more than pave the way, as it were, for the genius of the thirteenth-century designers. In these days it is difficult even to conceive of an age in which, suddenly, and by an inspiration, as it were, so much that was new and magnificent in conception should at once meet with hands capable of giving it such perfect execution. Everywhere throughout the land the same spirit seemed to have infused itself; the traveller may go from Paris to Bordeaux and Toulouse, from thence to Lyons, and so again by Nevers and Bourges to Paris, Rouen, Laon, and Rheims, and at this epoch of marvellous unity he will detect, it is true, the presence of various schools of art at the same time, but he will have to consider before he assigns to one pre-eminence over the other, and will feel that, with all our boasted improvements, no conceivable change of system or circumstances, no schools of art or museums, no new modes of education or training could ever enable us to vie, even in the humblest way, with these marvellous works.

In England, at the same period, we have an entirely different feeling displayed in old examples. The doorways were comparatively small and modest, and the workmen who wrought them were not to be compared with their French contemporaries. It is true, indeed, that

the sculptures of the west front of Wells Cathedral are admirable as works of art, but they produce much less architectural effect, being raised somewhat too much from the eye, and diapered all over the broad surface of the wall, whilst the doors are small, one may almost say insignificant, and enriched only with mouldings and shafts. So again at York the noble south transept has a small door of the severest simplicity; and the south door of the Angels' choir at Lincoln is almost the only English doorway where there is something of the French grandeur of design, conception, and story, combined with and enhanced by the peculiar delicacy which is the charm and pride of our best English art. In truth, sculpture was never developed in England as it was in France, and we must not put the doorways of our country in comparison with those which are seen there. There is, however, one façade in England which may be said to be peerless,—that of Peterborough. Here, three vast arches, rising the entire height of the fabrick, cross the whole west front; the doorways behind them are of the usual modest dimensions, but the charm of this great porch is indescribable; you see the deep shadow of the arches rising high above the surrounding houses as you approach the city from the distance; they are adorned with line upon line of moulding, carried by whole ranges of delicate shafts, and surmounted by gables filled with niches and sculpture, and circular windows of rare beauty, flanked and divided by lofty pinnacles. This may, in truth, be said to be the most poetic conception of the thirteenth century in England; it deserves a pilgrimage from the farthest part of the empire from all

those who wish really to grasp the combined power and tenderness of the thirteenth-century art, and lives in the recollections of all who have seen it with eyes capable of appreciating it, as among the most lovely of man's creations.

In Italy the doorways of the same period are, like ours, insignificant after the French. Those which form the western entrance to the Cathedral at Genoa are perhaps the finest examples we have of the best purely Italian art. You all know, probably, how devoted Italian architects were to the use of colour in construction. Genoa, rich in dark limestone, and within easy reach by sea of the quarries of white marble at Carrara, played a part of no little importance in this kind of work, and the three western doorways of her cathedral are the best evidence of the work that her architects achieved. Here the black and white marbles are used with consummate skill to produce all the effect possible. Alternate courses of the two materials, diapered with delicate tracery patterns inlaid in white on the black and black on the white, give its peculiar character to the work; the mouldings are delicate and refined, and though there is not a vast quantity of sculpture, what there is is effective and refined. There is no doubt that such doorways are more suited to the climate of Genoa than to that of England; but the great difference of their character from anything that we possess, combined as it is with perfect harmony with all the rules and traditions of the style, are interesting as showing the enormous range of ground covered by architects at the time in various parts of Europe.

The sculpture, which is so distinguishing a mark of thirteenth-century architecture, was displayed with the greatest effect in such works as the great doorways : but not only there. You will bear in mind, in considering this part of the subject, how important the office of the architect is. I, naturally enough, consider his to be the greatest and mother of all arts—first, oldest, and noblest of all ! But architecture, when it flourishes most, does so in harmony with painting and sculpture, and is most happily employed when they too are most ennobled. The age of Phidias was the great age of Greek architecture, so the period of Niccola Pisano was that of the greatest and noblest Gothic art. The history of this great artist is, no doubt, known to many of you, and his works to some at any rate. Thanks to the enterprize of the Director of the South Kensington Museum, it is now possible to form some idea of the merits of his work without travelling to Italy, for there we have casts of his great works, 'The Pulpits in the Baptistery and Cathedral at Pisa. He was born at Pisa in quite the early part of the century, was at once taught so much of architecture, and profited so rapidly by what he was taught, that, when but fifteen years of age he was appointed architect to Frederick II, and went with him at once to Naples. Here he rested ten years, when he went to Padua, and was at once employed on the vast church of St. Anthony. Here his work as an architect still remains. It is not a work which can be set by the side of our great Gothic buildings in the north of Europe at the same time ; but it is nevertheless bold, impressive, and full of

originality. Niccola Pisano must have seen and admired St. Mark's at Venice, for he reproduced the cluster of domes which marks that noble church on his own Gothic building. The result is strange, though certainly striking. It is as a sculptor, however, not as architect, that I wish now to speak of him. One of his earliest known works is a deposition from the Cross executed in about 1234. Here, with a certain rudeness of design, there is, nevertheless, a very grand conception of some of the figures, and considerable originality in their treatment and grouping. It was about 1260 that his great work, The Pulpit in the Baptistery at Pisa was commenced. Here we see distinct evidence of the truth of the stories which are told of his study of the antique, for whilst the whole design is thoroughly Gothic, no one can doubt for an instant that it was made by a man who had studied antique sculpture, and become to a certain extent possessed by its spirit. The groups of figures which adorn the panels of this pulpit are somewhat crowded, and the draperies are heavy, but still there is a most careful attempt to reproduce the actual facts of life, and a great superiority to conventional traditions. Towards the end of the century he and his pupils worked on the sculptures which cover the whole lower part of the front of the Cathedral at Orvieto. Here, where subjects from the "Creation" to the "Last Judgment" are sculptured with a prodigality of detail hardly to be matched elsewhere, it is impossible to praise too highly the *motif* of the whole, or the exquisite grace and truth of many of the separate figures. The figure of our Lord attended by angels in the "days

of creation " is beyond description beautiful, and crowns fitly and nobly the efforts of Italian sculptors in this century. The lesson which such a life as that of Niccola Pisano teaches is that of the importance of thorough harmony between the allied arts of the sculptor and architect. Niccola himself was undoubtedly greater as a sculptor than as an architect; but he was great in both; and it is much to be wished that he found an occasional imitator in this now-a-days. Sculptors in the north of Europe at the same period occupied a somewhat different place. They had no such opportunities as he had for the study of the antique, and their work grew naturally, therefore, out of the traditions of Byzantine and Romanesque schools, corrected by study from the life. Niccola Pisano was really an eclectic, just as we of necessity find ourselves forced to be, and studied all that was old with a veneration which was unknown to his less known northern contemporaries. Unusual as such an opinion may be, I nevertheless make bold to say that there were men among these who, nameless and unknown as they are, have left works even greater than any of his. The greatest school of sculptors, after the best of the Greeks was, I believe, that of the Ile-de-France and Champagne in the thirteenth century. The single figures, often larger than life, are so simple and stately in their *pose*, with draperies arranged in so masterly a fashion, and faces, hands, and feet so skilfully wrought, that it seems to be impossible at the present day to vie with them. The smaller bas-reliefs, which adorn the sides of monuments and doorways are equally good: there is a life, activity, and grace about the figures, a



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quaintness and piquancy of expression, and a refined simplicity in the whole treatment which is beyond measure charming: here, in truth, the sculptor loved his work, did it to the very best of his power, and with no mean or sordid *arrière pensée*, such as it seems so difficult to avoid in these days! In the sculpture of mere ornament there is the same difference in principle between the schools of this period and their successors. Their case, to state it as shortly as possible, was this. They found a system of sculpture, derived from classic examples, and entirely uncorrected by the study of Nature. They saw that this was wrong, and they devoted themselves to the study of Nature; but they never forgot that the mere imitation of Nature was worse than a mistake, and accordingly they devised a system of conventional carving of foliage, which, in fitness for its purpose, can never be excelled. It possessed all the elements which make natural growth so beautiful. It had life, air of growth, and beauty of outline. But it had also that which was equally wanted, an air of strength fitting it for its office, and so much repetition of parts as made it suit merely architectural members. The arrangement of the curves to secure delicate varieties of light and shade were very skilful: lights were broadly massed, and though the work was much undercut, it was not so much so as to give any appearance of weakness. Towards the end of the century it became more the fashion to attempt an absolute imitation of natural forms,—a pernicious mistake which it has again in our own days been attempted to revive. Natural forms cannot be exactly imitated in architectural construc-

ion; they are too slight and supple, and moreover, for their full development, they require the addition of natural colour, a consummation which has even been attempted on some modern realistic ironwork, with (as it seems to me) the most contemptible result! 11780.

It has been well said that the best natural work is really only a *noble abstraction* of natural form. This is accomplished by taking first the essential elements of the thing to be represented, then the rest in the order of their importance, and using any expedient to impress what we want upon the mind, without caring about the mere literal accuracy of the expedient. Suppose, for instance, a peacock has to be represented, the whole spirit and power of the bird are in the eyes in its tail. Express them, and you have done all that you can require. And so in an old marble inlay in a Venetian palace we see a peacock with expanded tail, the eyes of which are marked by spots of colour, and the outline of the feathers by lines so conventional in design, that one could hardly at first believe it would produce the desired effect: yet, in truth, the effect is distinct and admirable; far more so than any more close imitation of Nature would have been.\* 'The direct imitation of natural forms was occasionally attempted in this early work, but always under the severest conditions: simply as ornament, never when work was to be done, or weights carried; there the architect always felt it to be wiser to recur to conventional treatment of Nature.

You can nowhere see more lovely examples of the carving of foliage than those which still remain in the

\* I borrow this illustration from Mr. Ruskin.

capitals on the north side of the nave of Christ Church Dublin. It is much to be wished that they had been cleaned of the whitewash which now obscures their beauty; but whenever this is done, I trust it will be with the utmost possible care, and under skilful direction, for with less than this it is sure to be ruined in the process of cleaning.

English sculpture was not so plentiful as French but at the same time it was so fine as to deserve not to be passed over in silence. Such sculpture as that of the angels playing musical instruments which fill the spandrels of the triforium of the choir at Lincoln are as lovely as anything of their age; the figures, full of delicate *esprit*, and overflowing with natural beauty. So again, there are no works of their age more worthy of admiration than the sculptures on the west front of Wells. Here even Flaxman was constrained to admit that we have the work of a very great master of his art. But it is not only in these larger works that sculpture is to be seen. Every great church, and numberless small village churches in all directions, still retain monuments of the mighty dead, the effigies of whom are not unfrequently of the noblest description. Crusaders, bishops, kings, and queens, lie extended on these tombs with their hands in prayer, stiff and similar in attitude but so finely sculptured that one need never tire of studying them. The sides of the tombs themselves are also not unfrequently sculptured, and as fortunately these relics have been on the whole tenderly dealt with we have a larger store of them probably than any other nation in Europe.

One might dwell on such a subject for ever : but I must not do this, but will now ask you to go on with me to consider another important division of the detail—the thirteenth-century windows. These were very varied in style. The earliest examples are evidently mere translations of the old Norman window into pointed. The arches are pointed, but the openings or lights are heavy in proportion, and adorned inside and out with shafts and mouldings. Lights such as these were then combined together, the spandrels left between their arches were filled with geometrical patterns, first of all only sunk in the stone, then enclosed within mouldings, and finally pierced. Early in the century cusping was invented, and the combinations of simple cusps in the heads of arcades, and afterwards in the heads of window-lights, soon led naturally to their introduction also in windows. First of all, a group of lancets had a pierced and cusped circle above them, then several circles ; and, finally, these were all enclosed within an arched line, defined by a delicate moulding or label. The pieces of wall between the lights were diminished in thickness, and after a time set back from the face of the wall, whilst the outer label or moulding developed into a rich recessed group of shafts or mouldings, which combined, strengthened, and defined the whole composition. A group of lancets thus combined led the way naturally to regular traceried windows, and accordingly very early in the century, as, e. g., at Netley Abbey, we find fully developed examples, which hardly yield in real beauty and dignity to any of a later date. The question of window tracery was,

however, held as it were in solution during the whole century, for we find the simple lancet still used sometimes even among the later examples ; and seeing how pure and natural it is in its character, how modest and unassuming, and finally, how economical and convenient, it is rather a matter of surprise that it should ever have been given up. It often happens that men seem to arrive at excellence in what they do on the very first attempt. A man's first serious picture is, as we have often seen, a vast leap towards perfection, which can only be improved on afterwards by slow and painful degrees and processes. So with window tracery ; it is not only that the root of all that was best in this was struck in the thirteenth century ; much more than this, perfection was at once achieved, and subsequent modifications present continual steps on a downward course. Let us see how this was. The earliest windows were, as we have seen, mere piercings through the thickness of the wall. The window-opening seen from without, a dark spot in the wall—seen from the inside, a bright space of light. In this simple first state, it was easy to unite it with the other architectural features of the building, and in itself it was good and pure in outline. Then when the development, which I have described, produced that combination of cusped piercings in the stone, which in its most decided stage is commonly called plate-tracery, the effect was still good, but required much more skill to make it harmonize with the architectural lines of the building. But, when carefully contrived, this kind of tracery was perfect in its effect. There are two elements to be considered in designing tracery,

and here both were well considered, and allotted their exact and proper functions and limits. These two are, first, the pierced opening; second, the lines of mouldings which enclose them. In a perfect window both are good in form; in a bad window one is sacrificed to the other. The earliest windows had regard *only* to the pierced opening, and were good as far as they went. The best thirteenth-century examples of tracery had all their leading lines formed of geometrical curves, uniting and joining each other accurately, and filling with due gradations of form the whole space enclosed by the label or arch. These geometrical forms were then adorned with cusplings, which were also true and geometrical in outline, so that, whether the window was seen from without or within, its effect was always good. Then, when men wished to develope, and, as they thought, to improve on these models, they devoted themselves to modifying the lines between the piercings, without reference to the effect on the outline of the latter. The consequence was, that, though the lines of the tracery became elegant and flamboyant, the spaces pierced between them (which are of more importance) became extremely awkward and irregular in shape, twisting and curving about in various directions, in order to occupy all the corners left by the wavy lines of the tracery. If you have followed me in this analysis, you will be able to apply the principles I have stated in criticizing modern works, and will generally be able, without much difficulty, to learn pretty clearly from it, whether the work you are looking at is mere ignorant task-work, or really the fruit of attentive and living study of old examples!

There is no feature which is more attractive than a well designed early Pointed window. The refinement of the curves of the outlines and openings is well supported by the delicate skill with which the mouldings are divided and subordinated—some following the great enclosing arch, some the leading lines of the tracery, and others confined to the sub-cusping or foliation which fills in the spaces enclosed. Where this distinction between the mouldings fitted for serious work, and those intended for enrichment only is not observed, there you may always assume pretty safely that the work—whether old or new—is not from the hand of a master of his art. One class of window, the rose or marigold, may be said to have been brought quite to perfection in the thirteenth century, not only in England, but on the continent also, and examples of it are very numerous; the decided circular outline seems to have lent itself much more naturally to a filling in with geometrical forms than to any of the special features which marked the subdivisions of the tracery in the later styles of window tracery.

Having thus discussed two of the most important features in old buildings—the doors and windows—it is impossible to avoid saying a few words on the subject of the mouldings, to which both of them owed so much of their effect; but they shall be as short and clear as I can make them. Mouldings differed much in different countries,—in hot climates, where the power of the sun was infinite, there was no necessity for deep sinkings or undercuttings in order to produce effect; every,

even the slightest, indentation on the surface was visible; and complicated mouldings would have been almost lost in the dark recesses of the shadows thrown upon them. In the north of Europe great dissimilarity existed for another reason; in France the upper member of the capital was square in plan, following the old classical traditions, whilst in England it was usually circular or octagonal. The consequence was that as the mouldings were of necessity so planned as to fit the capital, in the former country they were usually divided into a succession of orders, each filling in a square outline, and producing very decided lights and shades; in the latter they were always filled in to a chamfered or splayed outline, and one group of mouldings followed another with far less distinct effect of light and shade. French mouldings became therefore bold in their effect and subdivisions, whilst English mouldings were generally very delicate in their contour, and infinitely varied and proportioned, so as to give those effects of light and shade which the constructional arrangement of the orders of the arch did not afford. It would be impossible to explain by word of mouth the science and art of moulding; suffice it to say now that architectural mouldings are at least as susceptible of artistic treatment and combination as any other features. In some respects it is more difficult to succeed in designing them than anything else; they require a refined eye for pure form, great freedom of hand for their proper delineation, and a constant recollection of the office they are to perform and the position they are to occupy. In all these respects thirteenth-century mouldings are unsurpassed,—I ought



rather to say unequalled—and you would be surprised, if you were to make a careful study of them in any good old building, and then were to go fresh from them to the large majority of modern buildings, to see how little they have been studied or understood even by men who at first sight appear to have some knowledge of mediæval art. The old mouldings of the main arches on the north side of the nave of Christ Church Cathedral are admirable in their design, and thoroughly illustrate all that I have said as to the beauty of those of this period in England, for they are entirely English in their character. In addition to simple mouldings the thirteenth-century architects made very free use of enriched mouldings. These had, besides mouldings, carved flowers at regular intervals, sometimes merely mechanical works, and at others full of free and beautiful carving of foliage; their great beauty consists in the bright effects of light and shade which they produced, in their extreme richness of effect, and in the power they gave the artist of laying emphasis wherever he wished it. Here again you must remember that indulgence in such enrichments is always liable to run into extravagant forms, and that they are by no means to be admired when they have been used needlessly or without restraint. But this was seldom the case in the thirteenth century, the refined simplicity of outline which characterized all works, great and small alike, acting as a very sensible check on the designer of ornament where he was not the architect.

Whilst the other decorations of thirteenth-century buildings were so full of beauty of development beyond what had before been seen, there was one art which may

almost be said to be the great invention of the period, —that of painting on glass. So few are the examples of painting on glass of the twelfth century, that the history of the art practically begins at its close ; and in this art, with the same happy fortune which, as we have before seen, attended the first adventure in the design of window tracery, success of the highest kind was the immediate result of that close attention to reality in treatment and execution which marked all the works of the period. The conditions under which ornamentation of glass in windows can be allowed are so obvious and so decided that it might be thought that they admitted of no dispute ; how far this is from the fact may be judged when we reflect that, at the present day, scarcely one of all the manufacturers of stained glass takes any pains to confine his work within these limits or conditions. Glass in windows ought to be transparent and brilliant, and it can only be used properly in separate pieces leaded together, each piece of colour being on a distinct piece of glass ; it must therefore be a mosaic, and cannot attempt to vie with the free work of the painter's brush on walls or canvas. Its most marked qualities must be brilliancy of colour, transparency of effect, and distinctness of outline. In these qualities no other vehicle can rival it, and true wisdom consists in using it most for those purposes for which it is most fitted. The attempt to imitate wall-paintings, which has been often made of late, is, from the nature of the material, sure to fail, and will, in course of time, fail still more signally than it has when decay sets in, as it will in such complicated work much sooner than in a

mosaic of properly coloured material, such as the early painters used. The one is of necessity perishable and not thoroughly transparent, the other may be said truly to be indestructible and is perfectly transparent. The mosaic mode is therefore that which seems to be the true and proper one, and the early painters may be said to have been fortunate in knowing of no other. Their glass is generally either extremely rich in gorgeous colour or of the simplest possible kind, painted with delicate trailing patterns of foliage on a white ground. In the former the tints used were extremely brilliant, and the whole detail of the richest possible description. The artists regarded their work rather as intended to conduce to the general tone of colour in the building, than to teach people in the way in which a picture on a wall might teach them. It is true that their windows in churches are often full from one end to the other of figures or subjects painted in the most elaborate way; it would have been impossible indeed to dispense with "subject" windows; but, on the other hand, they were evidently designed much more with a view to gaining the greatest amount of general effect, than to producing the prettiest or most intelligible picture in one spot. If you were to examine some of the best of the thirteenth-century glass, you would see that the whole of the design, and the mode of drawing are made entirely subservient to the requirements of the material. The foliage enrichments are drawn with great power, untiring patience, and marvellous intricacy; the figures are rude, as might be expected at the hands of men who had seldom if ever thought of studying from the life; but they were always drawn

with an honest desire to make them tell their story, and with a vigour and distinctness of action which cannot be too much praised. If then, after looking at old glass, you were to examine the modern imitations of it, you would find them startlingly deficient in almost all the good qualities of the former. The material used is thin and poor in tint; the drawing, in trying to be correct, has become tame and insipid, and the arrangement of colour shows generally but little appreciation of the right mode of producing effect. So that here, as in almost all other matters, thirteenth-century art, tried by the test of critical examination, comes out from the ordeal unscathed, whilst the work of our own days appears to be scarcely art, but rather a habit of thoughtless compliance with what is supposed to be the taste of the day. What is true of the early treatment of stained glass is true also of almost all other thirteenth-century decorative works. It was then that the art of the enameller was most perfect; the greatest Limoges works, the shrines, the sacred vessels, the croziers and pastoral staves, the effigies and ornaments, which were produced there with such marvellous prodigality, all teach the same lesson, the certain success of attention to first principles in art.

In this age there is one evidence of the care with which buildings were planned which ought not to be overlooked. Westminster Abbey—to take as an example the most perfect English church of the period—is designed upon a regular system of proportion founded on the equilateral triangle. The evidence of this is too clear to be disputed, and the same thing has been proved of various other buildings. It does not follow that a

building so proportioned will be better than one which owes its proportions to the eye of the artist ; but it is pretty sure to be agreeable in its lines ; and at any rate when we see buildings so designed, we may be sure, of what we know indeed from other sources, that the designers were men of some scientific acquirements.

It is now time that I should conclude these somewhat desultory remarks, and in so doing that I should attempt to gather up and impress again upon you the whole essence of what I have wished to tell you. True it is, as I think, that the art of the thirteenth century has never been properly appreciated ; one might well say of it, in the words of the latest departed of our great poets, the revered John Keble,—

“ Alas ! of thousand bosoms kind  
That daily court you and caress,  
How few the happy secret find  
Of your calm loveliness ! ”

Men *do* admire, but in too general a way ; everything they see is beautiful ; and for such general admiration I have no great respect. He who loves art genuinely must be able to give some reason for his love, and an admiration for it which exists without any exercise of critical faculties, is never to be counted as *bonâ fide* admiration at all ! In these days there is no general and unanimous feeling as to what is good and true in architecture ; whilst it was the glory of the thirteenth century that its artists vulgarized art, so to speak. It was just as among the Greeks ; art was everywhere, in the cottage as well as in the palace, in the

dress and utensils of the peasant, quite as much as in those of the priest or the prince; in the fortress, in the crypt, just as much as in the sumptuous dining-hall or the noblest cathedral. There was no discussion about it, no thought as to what was right or wrong, but simply the most natural and quiet habit of *doing* what was right, in the most straightforward way. Men had no "views" about art; they inherited a certain system, but, far from tamely adhering to it, they strove with ceaseless energy to improve and develope it. All their work was, in the best sense, the expression of their delight in God's work; and real delight in Nature involves in the end a real desire to do nothing less true or natural than what one sees in Nature's works. So it is no wonder that the architecture of this wonderful age is marked beyond all other periods, before or since, by most of the virtues of the best art. Simplicity, purity, force, grace, tenderness, sobriety, are some of the attributes which I think every one would agree in giving it. Few, indeed, but those who have studied long and closely know to how great an extent such terms are justified, how each fresh inspection of the work of this great age, each study of a small detail, only increases all one's veneration and respect. How, again, every attempt one ventures to make to form in oneself the same frame of mind seems to be met at each turn by some almost insurmountable obstacle; how, when one has converted oneself, one finds the world cold, unappreciative, and ignorant,—most so, too often, when it talks most glibly of art; and how, in spite of museums, treatises, and lectures, art, in becoming subject of careless discussion

everywhere, runs some risk, ere long, of ceasing altogether to possess any of the properties of art.

One remedy, and one only, there seems to me to be for this fatal condition of affairs; it is that artists themselves should recur to the first principles which underlie all good art, and trust entirely in the effect of true and honest treatment of their work; and next, that you the public, instead of admiring with ready thoughtlessness whatever meets your eye, should cultivate, as far as possible, your critical faculties, and lose no opportunity of studying the best old works, and then of applying the test which they supply to the examination of modern works. It is the absence of healthy and searching criticism at the present day which is more than anything else to be regretted in considering the future of architecture; and there is no discipline so good for the critic, no study so inspiring, as that of the works of the age to which we have endeavoured to-day to draw your attention. My acquaintance with Ireland is not sufficient to enable me to attempt anything like a direction as to the way in which this noble art may here best be studied. You have churches, cathedrals, and castles, which, if inferior in scale to those of which we are so proud in England are hardly second to some of them in artistic interest. Your early Irish art was of the noblest description, and it may perhaps be difficult for you to feel so much enthusiasm about what was evidently a style imported from England, such as one sees in St. Patrick's and in Christ Church, Dublin, at Cashel or Kilkenny, or elsewhere in the thirteenth-century buildings. You must recollect, however, that we in England derive

our art from the Continent, and if you gained something from us you only obeyed a universal law. You must be cosmopolitan in such a matter as this, and regarding the thirteenth century as that in which all the best art of Europe in the middle ages had its rise, you will best be able to appreciate the degree in which modern art falls short of one recognized standard of perfection.









# TENNYSON'S WORKS.

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## TENNYSON'S WORKS.

**W**ITH whatever deepest reverence we may bow before the great poets of the past, it is yet natural that we should turn with a quite special interest to listen to the inspired singer of our own age. In particular, the young and ardent souls of each period, who instinctively feel and spontaneously represent its tendencies, are powerfully attracted by the contemporary voice, which, though perhaps in itself less profound and penetrating, yet seems to reach them more easily, and touch them more nearly. Immersed in the same social atmosphere they breathe, and subject to all the spiritual influences by which they are affected, the poet of their own time awakens in them a readier, if not a stronger, thrill of sympathy. Such a charm Tennyson has, in a remarkable degree, exercised on the England—especially the young England—of our day. Rarely has any poet won for himself during his lifetime so large a place in the minds and hearts of his fellow-countrymen. He did not, indeed, like Byron, take the world by storm, and leap into a sudden popularity. But since,

by the publication of some of his best minor works, he established his position as a true poet, his acceptance amongst the cultivated classes has gone on steadily widening and deepening. I say, "amongst the cultivated classes;" for without considerable culture it is impossible thoroughly to understand him, and the mass of the people he does not seem likely ever to reach. But, wherever minds are prepared to appreciate him, wherever there is any real capacity for feeling and enjoying poetry like his, his writings are continually more and more known, and studied, and valued. It is a consequence of this state of things that I may assume, in an audience such as I see before me, a pretty intimate acquaintance with the works of which I have undertaken to speak. It will, therefore, not be necessary for me, in the remarks I am about to offer to you, to enter into any detailed account of the subjects of these works, or to illustrate by specimens their general character and texture. I will seek rather to bring out here and there some new significance in them; to answer, where I can, objections which have been urged against their substance or their spirit; and, in a few instances, to point out, with due diffidence, what seem to me faults in conception, or defects in execution. I will pass in review the successive writings of Tennyson, just as I might lead you along a gallery adorned with the works of some great painter, already not unfamiliar to you, giving you my impressions of each, trying to make its purpose clearer, and to make you feel more completely its artistic merit, as well as its moral suggestiveness.

In the three early series of minor poems, published in 1830, 1833, and 1842 respectively, we can trace very plainly the growth of Tennyson's powers. In the first two series we see him developing with remarkable rapidity the peculiar mode of thought and turn of expression which stamp him as an original poet. The "Mariana," produced not later than his twentieth year, is a wonderfully powerful picture of intense human feeling in harmony and relation with certain impressive aspects of external nature. In the second series there are several pieces, which are surprising productions for a youth of twenty-three. The "Ænone" is an admirable rendering of the subject, so dear to painters, of the Judgment of Paris, in which the poet, whilst finely availing himself of the picturesque capabilities of the Judgment scene, has given it a deeper interest to our emotions by bringing out its relation to a history of human passion. In the "Lotus Eaters" he has wrought, on the basis of a Homeric fable, a noble lyric strain, full of exquisite description, and profoundly suggestive with respect to the condition and destinies of man. In the "Palace of Art" he has broadly sketched out a striking conception—though the execution somewhat fails—that, namely, of Art divorced from morality, and so, instead of exalting our nature by fostering the sympathetic feelings, debasing it by generating a refined, exclusive, egoism. At the same time that the poet thus exhibits the development of his genius, he clears himself of certain characteristic blemishes which marred his initial efforts. There was sometimes in these a too great subtlety of thought and language—a straining

after far-fetched images, and a false intensity of expression. We feel in reading them that the general effect is not seldom sacrificed to exaggerated prettinesses of detail—we are conscious, here and there, of a sort of frost-glitter, instead of a genial warmth. In the third series which Tennyson did not publish till nearly ten years after the second, there is a marked ripening both of his nature and his art. His sympathies have become heartier, and his tone more real. His hand has gained new steadiness and sureness, and his conceptions are worked out with masterly coherence and completeness. Amongst the products of this period are several which mark as great perfection in some directions as he has ever reached. There is the noble fragment of *Ulysses* which, both in thought, language, and versification, has a genuine epic grandeur; there is the “*Morte d’Arthur*,” with something of the true epic tone again, and with a fine picturesqueness and solemn impressiveness; there is the “*Vision of Sin*,” in which the frenzy of guilty pleasure is described with such exuberance of lyric expression, and its natural Nemesis is represented with such grim austere force and truth; and, lastly, there is the “*Locksley Hall*,” that passionate chant in which are so vividly uttered all the undisciplined thoughts, the wayward fancies, the lofty but vague aspirations, that effervesce in the spirit of the cultivated youth of the nineteenth century.

Our view of the progress of Tennyson’s genius is often confused by wrongly referring the composition of “*In Memoriam*” to the date of its publication (1850). That work is, as you all know, a tribute to the memory

of Arthur Henry Hallam, son of the eminent historian. Now it is clearly discernible from internal evidence that most of the little elegies of which it is composed were written within the three or four years which followed young Hallam's death towards the close of 1833 ; so that many of them ought without doubt to be placed chronologically before pieces comprised in the third series of minor poems, already spoken of, published in 1842. And, accordingly, in much of " *In Memoriam* " we are struck by a certain crudeness of manner, and an involution and obscurity of expression which have entirely disappeared in the later productions of the poet. There is also in several of the elegies an appearance of effort—an absence of easy mastery—which may, however, be explained by what the author hints, that he sometimes had recourse to the work of composition, not from the impulse of inspiration, but to deaden by the " mechanic exercise " the pangs of his regret.

May I be pardoned if, rising here for a moment into a higher domain than that of criticism, I say a word on the moral significance of " *In Memoriam* " as a whole ? It brings before us, I think, a priceless, but much-neglected means of spiritual improvement, the efficacy of which not even the most sceptical can deny. I mean habitual subjective communion with the worthy and beloved dead, whom we have known with sufficient intimacy to have appreciated their excellence, and profited by their converse. We could not fail to reap from such sacred exercises the fruit of increased purity and nobleness. But, in our hurry of pre-occupation or



dull absorption in material cares, we too often put away from us those blessed memories, or recall them but fitfully and transiently, instead of making them by deliberate cultivation an ever present influence. And so, the best effects of love upon our nature are lost—love, which does but half its work, if it be not stronger than death.

From a touching memoir of young Hallam, by his father, to which two of his Cambridge fellow-students have contributed their reminiscences, we catch some idea of his intellectual and moral lineaments. Of an ardent and generous spirit, he delighted in disinterested research after the highest truth. His adventurous and aspiring intellect loved to soar into the airy regions of metaphysical speculation, and wrestle with the mysterious problems of man's nature and destiny. He had a lively appreciation of poetic beauty and grandeur; he delighted, we are told, for a time in the "turbulent brilliancy" of Shelley, and afterwards found a grave charm in the "calm depth" of Wordsworth; but, with most profound and abiding loyalty, he did homage to the mighty genius of Dante. His purity of soul raised him above the vices of youth; and his rare sweetness of disposition drew towards him, with subtle charm, young and old alike who came within the sphere of its influence. But very faint is the impression we gather even from those pages hallowed by a father's affection, compared with that which is made by the noble portraiture in which the poet has fixed for ever the features of his lost friend :—

" Heart-affluence in discursive talk  
 From household fountains never dry;  
 The critic clearness of an eye  
 That saw through all the Muses' walk :  
 Seraphic intellect and force  
 To seize and throw the doubts of man,  
 Impassion'd logic, which outran  
 The hearer in its fiery course :  
 High nature, amorous of the good,  
 But touch'd with no ascetic gloom,  
 And passion pure in snowy bloom  
 Through all the years of April blood . . . .  
 And manhood fused with female grace  
 In such a sort, the child would twine  
 A trustful hand, unask'd, in thine,  
 And find his comfort in thy face."

Singularly attractive are the glimpses presented here and there through " *In Memoriam* " of the several phrases of the " fair companionship " of the friends during the " four sweet years " in which they walked the path of life together. Now we have a reminiscence of their intercourse in the " reverend walls," where together they " wore the gown," and where Hallam, the centre of a band of congenial spirits, often led the high debate

" On mind and art  
 And labour and the changing mart,  
 And all the framework of the land."

Again we catch a view of the two friends on their summer tour in Southern France, filling the hours with talk of men and mind and the large promise of the future, as they walk

“ By river fortress, mountain ridge,  
The cataract flashing from the bridge,  
The breaker breaking on the beach.”

Or, again, the poet has welcomed his friend—

“ Fresh from brawling courts  
And dusty purlieus of the law,”

to revive his jaded spirits among the sights and sounds of nature, and the social pleasures of a rural home. We see them as they wander over the hills, and dine in the distant woods—ambrosial banquets, where philosophy and poetry are relish to the feast; or Arthur, stretched upon the grass, reads the Tuscan poets amidst a listening circle; or, in the summer twilight, the poet's happy sister—affianced bride of Hallam—“flings a ballad to the moon.” Days for ever memorable—fair, soft, vernal days of youth, and hope, and love—looking to the soul's retrospective glance through Time's mellowing distance still softer and fairer than they were.

But with regretful record of that hallowed past is gradually inwoven a complex web of varied reflection and speculation. Around the central figure of his dead friend the poet gathers countless images, borrowed from every phase of individual or social experience, and throws upon his tomb a thousand lights and shadows from art, and science, and philosophy. His Melpomene even invades the province of her elder and more august sister, Urania. She summons up the importunate questionings about things unseen, which have in every age haunted the soul of man, and marshals once more the antagonist forces which have long

maintained a dubious conflict on the battle-field of thought. All through, as again in the "Two Voices," is heard the mutual challenge and reply of Doubt and Faith; and the triumph of the latter is not entirely unequivocal. I think there is a disposition in some minds to rest too large a share of the poet's reputation on these efforts to embody metaphysical discussion in beautiful and rhythmic words. For myself I will own that amidst the grey haze of insoluble problems I do not care to linger. I gladly escape from these inconclusive controversies to other passages of the book, where I find the warmth and colour of genial human traits or noble social aspirations. Such is that in which he compares himself to the happy lover, who, hastening to the home of his beloved, learns that she is gone and far away, but finds there and cherishes a flower which had been fostered by her hand; that in which he conceives his friend's death as like, and yet, ah, how unlike! to the departure of a bride from her father's house to enter other realms of love; that in which he imagines the glorified spirit looking back on life as one who has risen from humble beginnings to high offices of state may look back on his native hamlet and the companions of his boyhood; that in which he likens his mingled awe and love for the departed one to the feeling of strong and simple trust which the wife of some great genius may feel for a nature she believes in, though she does not understand; that in which he calls on the wild bells to welcome with a jubilant peal the dawn of a brighter spiritual day.

In 1847 appeared the first of Tennyson's longer poems,

the "Princess." It is introduced by a prologue which is a true Idyll, and one of the most natural and graceful pictures he has ever drawn of a scene from the English life of our own time. Sir Walter Vivian has thrown open his demesne to the people for a summer's day; and the park swarms with his tenants and the inhabitants of the neighbouring town, especially the members of its Scientific Institute, who, having experiments exhibited to them, are at once enjoying recreation and imbibing instruction. A group of visitors at the Hall, along with the baronet's son, and some of his college friends, look with interest on this sight, so characteristic of the nineteenth century; and then, turning aside to view the ruins of a Gothic abbey in the grounds, are led to talk of the feudal times and the old traditions of Sir Walter's family, especially of one in which a lady of the house had armed

" Her own fair head, and, sallying through the gate,  
Had beat her foes with slaughter from the walls."

Lilia, the baronet's daughter, half sportively, half seriously, protests against the way in which now-a-days the powers of her sex are dwarfed by insufficient culture, or warped by the fetters of convention, so that they no longer exhibit such heroic qualities. Young Walter Vivian, in the course of some affectionate banter with his sister, mentions a favourite game he and his college companions used to play, of telling a tale from "mouth to mouth," one beginning, and others successively taking up the thread of the story, till among them they brought it to a close. Out of this sportive

talk arises the project of such a tale to be told then and there by the student friends; and they accordingly relate the story of the "Princess," the incidents being suggested by the strangely mixed topics they had been discussing—the protest of Lilia on behalf of her sex, the martial feats of the family heroine, the scientific experiments on the lawn. Every one knows that the conception out of which the plot develops itself is that of a Ladies' University, founded by the high-souled Princess Ida, who, grieved at what she considers the degraded condition of her sex, has devoted herself to the task of

"Raising the woman's fallen divinity  
Upon an equal pedestal with man."

The statement of this enterprise brings us face to face with one of the great practical problems of our age; and we find in Tennyson's selection of this theme a new example of the attraction which draws the eminent natures of each period towards the questions which are then most important to Humanity.

The "Princess" is justly entitled a "medley." The scene is laid, not in any definite region of earth, but in a poetical Utopia; nor can we fix the time of the action to any historic epoch; some features of mediæval life are made to co-exist with the most advanced scientific cultivation of modern Europe. It is such a mixture as we find in Shakespeare's "Winter's Tale;" and indeed in the prologue the name of that drama is introduced, as if to justify by precedent the incongruities of the narrative. But, medley though it is in form,

it is not so in essence; it has the real and deep-seated unity which art demands—that of a consistent purpose and a pervading harmony of tone. The strangeness of the plan does not really detract from the merits of a work in which the imagination consciously repudiates the conditions of every-day reality, and sports in a medium of its own creation.

The scenes in the college appear to me admirably executed. They required very delicate handling, bordering as they do on the region of the fantastic—nay, trembling sometimes on the verge of the grotesque. We feel throughout the fine felicity of Tennyson's touch. There is a sort of feminine grace and purity about them—no coarse association for a moment obtrudes itself. Nor is there anything of the satirical in the poet's tone: at most a "kindly irony" just glances stealthily at us through his descriptions. The poet evidently feels nobly, as well as thinks justly, about woman. Even whilst we are made to understand the hopelessness of Ida's project, justice is done to her high aspirations, and to the cause she has undertaken to vindicate. He has managed to suggest to our memories in one way or other almost all the historic glories of the sex—almost all those more or less exceptional natures amongst women which stand out conspicuous on the canvas of the past: Miriam and Deborah, and the questionable barbaric glory of Jael; Judith and Vashti, Sappho and Corinna, Cornelia and the Spartan Mother, Joan of Arc and Elizabeth. Tennyson himself, in the epilogue, observes how the poem, beginning in the light mock-heroic vein, slips from jest to

earnest, becoming gradually more and more grave in tone, till it ends in a very serious conclusion. It seems to me to lose something of its charm as it first rises thus to higher levels. In the warlike passages the serene Idyllic beauty of the college scenes is lost, without the substitution of a compensating interest. But again we seem to emerge upon a clear poetic table-land, when the crisis in the history of *Ida's* character is reached and surmounted. Beautifully has the poet shown the development of the true womanly elements in her nature. The tender domestic instincts are first awakened by the care of *Psyche's* child. Then, when, glorying in the triumph of her champions, she comes forth to offer hospitality to those who have suffered in her cause, she sees the old king's haggard face stooped over the prostrate body of his son—the son who had saved her life—and she is overwhelmed with a sudden storm of pity. She offers to tend the Prince and his fallen comrades. Aided by the sagest of her maidens, she enters on that gentle ministry. They hang over the bed of sickness; they talk, they sing, they read for the patients—

“To and fro .

With books and flow'rs, with angel offices,  
Like creatures native unto gracious act,  
And in their own clear element, they move.”

*Ida* specially devotes herself to the Prince; and slowly, very slowly, out of a thousand touching influences, out of his pain and languid weakness, out of

“Lonely listenings to his mutter'd dreams,  
And often feeling of the helpless hands,  
And wordless broodings on the wasted cheek,”

.



grows up first a closer interest, which passes gradually into tenderness, and at last deepens into love. Then she not only sees that her great design has failed; she owns that it deserved to fail. But she will not relinquish her high hopes of a nobler future for woman; nor is it needful that she should. "Rather," says the Prince,

"Henceforth thou hast a helper, me, that know  
'The woman's cause is man's: they rise or sink  
'Together, dwarf'd or godlike, bond or free."

And then in beautiful and majestic words, which live in all our memories, the poet describes the relations of man's nature to woman's, and paints the ideal of a perfect marriage.

I have heard it objected to the "Princess," that the solution of what is called the "woman's question," which is offered at the close, is, after all, but a vague and cloudy one. But it is the office of the poet, not so much to affirm principles on such a subject, as to inspire the sentiments which ought to preside over the solution. The error in *Ida's* enterprise was one of feeling rather than of judgment. If we ask ourselves whether her aspirations after a wider and deeper culture for her sex were legitimate, we must surely answer that they were: those of us who have faith in 'Time will add that they are destined, without doubt, to be realized in the future. We must, indeed, now-a-days, in the face of popular Utopias, grasp more firmly than ever the truth, that in domestic life, and in general there only, is the appropriate sphere of woman's action, and that her best office

is that of forming, softening, and elevating by her gentle influence the character of the active sex. But it is also a new truth, which must be harmonized with the old, that she needs a greater breadth and solidity of intellectual culture, and this for two objects—both to fit her still better for the high moral offices which belong to her domestic mission, and to keep alive in her a just sympathy with the larger social movements of which she is the passive, but ought not to be the uninterested spectator. Ida was right in striving after a more generous culture; but the spirit in which she sought it was wrong. She set the claims of the head above those of the heart; she aimed at ampler knowledge, not for social ends, but in the spirit of pride and self-exaltation; she took up, on behalf of her sex, a false and unnatural position of isolation and self-dependence. It is, as I have said, the office of poetry, not to guide the conclusions of the intellect, but to tone the feelings in accordance with truth and duty. And the best solution—the only solution possible for a poet,—for the questions raised in the “*Princess*,” lies precisely in the transfiguration of Ida’s nature under the influence of the affections. She is convinced of her error, not by logic speaking to the intellect, but by the silent appeal of appropriate objects to the heart. Her false ideal fades and vanishes at the magic touch of love.

The next in order of Tennyson’s writings is “*Maud*,” which he published, along with a few minor pieces, in 1855. The public and the reviewers at first were at a loss how to receive it. Some thought it unsatisfactory as a work of art; others represented it as preaching

false and dangerous social doctrines. But of feebleness or flatness no one could accuse it. Never was there in a poem more unmistakeable reality of feeling—the lines seem actually to thrill and leap with the fiery life of passion that streams along them. There is much that is strange in the substance and bizarre in the form of the work, as if the poet, fretting under the habitual constraint of an elaborate art, had resolved here for once to indulge the utmost freedom of poetic impulse. But, whatever else may be said of it, it is one of the most vital of books. Whether it be strong indignation that is to be expressed, or triumphant love, or remorseful despair, all is thoroughly and even intensely genuine. In its general plan it is, I think, a novelty in our literature. It consists of a series of lyrical effusions sung or spoken by one person at different successive periods, each embodying the feelings of the moment, and intimating the events out of which those feelings have arisen. Some of the critics have pronounced it to be a drama. But that would surely be a misnomer; a drama could not be made up of a series of monologues. The work, however, may in this sense be called dramatic, that the speaker is allowed to bring out the incidents of the story and develop the history of his mind, not in the way of narrative, but by the utterances which the events themselves awaken. The changes in his mental attitude are not described, but exhibited. It is important to bear this in mind when we seek to understand how far the poet is responsible for the views of life which he attributes to his hero.

This hero (if by such name he may be called) is one

in whom a morbidly sensitive nature has been embittered by wrong. In voluntary isolation from his fellows, he has nursed the spirit of revolt against a social system to which he owes no debt of gratitude. The poem opens with an angry soliloquy, in which he mixes up the memory of his own grievances with a fierce denunciation of the sins and miseries which are the curses of modern civilized life. Tortured by his own painful recollections, and with the taint of madness in his blood, he looks at all around him with a jaundiced eye, and sees nothing in the scheme of nature but selfishness and rapine—nothing in human life but baseness and falsehood. He is impatient of Peace sitting under her olive, in calm self-complacence, while a worse than open warfare, the selfish struggle of classes, is raging in the heart of society. He is tired of the men of mind, boasting of the progress of the age, and “slurring the days gone by,” whilst all around are to be seen the squalid misery that degrades the poor, the heartless fraud that stints still further their scanty pittance, the cruelty, born of wretchedness, that stifles even in the mother’s heart the natural tenderness for her offspring. The whole picture is overcharged, as in a brain whose unstable balance already presages the overthrow of reason. But there is an element of truth in all his fiery invectives; and the abrupt, jarring rhythm in which they are embodied is a most appropriate vehicle for these accents of revolt. The vehement sweep of his anathemas carries away the calmest reader, as we are told that bystanders were drawn by the contagion of passion to join in the wild dances of the Grecian Mænads.

Out of the heart of his desolation grows up slowly and timidly the flower of love. The face of Maud, once seen, haunts his daily visions and his nightly dreams. He dwells with brooding intensity on every faintest indication of her feelings; sometimes indulging the sweet thought that she looks on him with kindness; sometimes vexed with racking doubts of coquettish deceit on her part, or selfish art on her brother's. Gradually hope rises into rapturous certainty. Triumphant love, with the alchemy which poets have so often sung, turns for him the common things of daily life to gold. Nature is invested with a beauty unseen before—

“A livelier emerald twinkles in the grass —  
A purer sapphire melts into the sea.”

His egotistic complaints are silenced; healthier and manlier thoughts arise within him. He does not wish to die: rather

“To live a life of truest breath,  
And teach true life to fight with mortal wrongs.”

The feelings of the lover for Maud seem to me beautifully rendered. He often thinks and speaks of her with rapt adoration, as of a being far above himself; a sacred thing, shining from divine heights with a pure starry radiance; and, exquisitely blended with this, is the tender protecting attitude of his heart as towards a delicate, gentle, loving human creature.

Then comes the dinner at the hall—the secret meeting—the discovery—the insult—the blow—the duel: and the unhappy man's whole world instantaneously collapses in ruin. In the second part of the poem he reappears on

the coast of Britany, pursued by remorse, and filled with a vacant yearning. The balance of his faculties is disturbed; the images of the past take the reality and fixity of sensation; and he is tortured with the persistent presence of a tyrannous phantom. He receives tidings of the death of Maud; and the spark of will, which has as yet survived in him, soon dies out. But, before his reason succumbs, the poet gives voice to the mixture of passionate regret and infinite yearning within him in a splendid passage, which for vividness of feeling and spontaneity of flow could scarcely be surpassed. The mind of the sufferer now yields to the continued strain, and in the next monologue we have the fitful ravings of the maniac, in which all his former experiences and impressions are confusedly reproduced. Then follows what ought to be called the third part of the poem, for it is essentially tripartite. Here, after its lengthened aberrations, his mind returns to sanity, and Maud appears in a dream, dividing "from a band of the blest," to speak comfort to his soul, and rouse him to sympathy and joint action with his fellows in the coming war. He enters with all his heart into the struggle of the Western nations against the Russian Autocrat. As he stands on a giant deck, the spectre which had so long tormented him, disappears, flying northwards towards the scenes of battle. In the healthy influence of common social action the old negative and mutinous spirit dies away, and he is reconciled to Humanity.

This closing part of Maud was the subject of much angry criticism when the poem appeared. Tennyson

was alleged to have represented, in this and some other places, the long peace, commonly viewed as both morally and materially a blessing to Europe, as having been really a curse by enfeebling the social sentiments and nursing the selfish instincts into rank luxuriance, and he was supposed to have hailed war as the great regenerator of paralysed public feeling. The poet has not altogether disregarded these criticisms. In his later editions he has altered some expressions which were perhaps injudicious; "the long, long canker of peace," has been changed to "peace, which to me was no peace;" and he has added at the close some lines which bring out better the purpose of the final monologue. But, upon the whole, I think the poem was not open to fair objection on this ground. It must be remembered that the author does not speak in his own person; and the only condition to which he is subjected either by art or by morality is, that the mental position of his hero should be one sufficiently natural and justifiable to admit of a reasonable sympathy in the mind of the reader. The exaggerated denunciations, at the beginning of the poem, of social wrongs which seemed to be the fruit of peace, were evidently intended as manifestations of a morbid nature. The martial enthusiasm at the close was one which in a just cause it was surely excusable to feel; and those who remember the period of the Crimean war will not refuse to admit that the generous public sentiments were in fact powerfully revived in England by that great enterprise.

We have now arrived at that one of Tennyson's pro-

ductions which approaches most nearly to the measure of a great work—namely, “*The Idylls of the King*.” Almost from the dawn of his poetic life he had shown fondness for the Arthurian legends, and had treated in different ways various fragments of the story. One piece, the “*Morte d'Arthur*,” admirable of its kind, was such as might take its place, as he hints or feigns it had actually done, in a regular Epic of the King. But in the *Idylls* he has not viewed the subject from the epic side, or made the interest to centre in the heroic achievements of Arthur, as Milton or Dryden would, doubtless, have done in the works they are known to have projected on this theme. He has painted only a few groups out of the great picture, and those rather collateral and secondary than primary and prominent ones. Arthur, as warrior and ruler, is, in general, only indirectly exhibited to us: the chief actors are knights and ladies of the court, and the motives of the action are those, not of public, but of private life. It is not necessary that we should look for any special thread of connection to bind together the several *Idylls*; but if we do seek for it, it must be found, not in any direct bearing they have on the enterprises of Arthur, but in their common relation to the sin of Lancelot and Guinevere.

One of the most interesting ways in which we can study these *Idylls* is to compare them throughout with the original tales from which their incidents are borrowed. We thus bring into a clearer light the delicacy of the poet's art, and are led to observe many felicitous touches which might otherwise escape us. And we



appreciate better the purity and elevation of his nature when we perceive how he transforms the materials of the old romances so as to make them accord with the requirements of a more enlightened conscience or a finer moral sensibility. This kind of study is peculiarly applicable to the first Idyll, because in it Tennyson follows, on the whole, very closely the Welsh tale on which it is founded, whose author—whoever he was—certainly had the soul of a poet. In the ancient tale, as in the modern poem, a forester of Dean enters the palace, and tells of the white stag that has been seen. Guinevere sleeps long, and goes late to see the hunt, and is joined by Prince Geraint, who is late also. Even the minor picturesque trait of the gold apples that swing at the end of Geraint's purple scarf, as he gallops up the knoll, is found in the Welsh original. The knight, lady, and dwarf pass by, and first Guinevere's handmaid, and then Geraint, are treated with indignity by the dwarf. But here Tennyson diverges from his original; in the Welsh, the dwarf smites the handmaid across the face, and draws blood; but so coarse an act is too painful to modern susceptibilities; and in the Idyll the dwarf strikes at the maiden without hurting her, and wounds Geraint only. Then, as has been well pointed out, in the original the prince abstains from inflicting immediate punishment from the prudential consideration that, if he slew the dwarf, he must afterwards, unarmed, encounter the knight; but Tennyson, with finer perception of character, throws a moral element into the act of self-restraint:—

“ His quick, instinctive hand  
Caught at the hilt, as to abolish him ;  
But he, from his exceeding manfulness,  
And from nobility of temperament,  
Wroth to be wroth with such a worm, refrained.”

Geraint follows the party, determined to exact vengeance for the insult to the Queen and to himself; and then the story goes on substantially the same in the romance and the poem, though in the latter with a beauty of detail and a dramatic liveliness that far surpass the original. The scenes in Yniol's ruined castle are exquisitely given in the *Idyll*, from the place where Geraint, as he enters, hears Enid singing, to that where he explains and excuses his wish that she should go with him to court in her faded garments. I know no finer delineation of sweet maidenly simplicity, and of the fond confiding intimacy of a mother and daughter, than the poet has given us in these passages. The effect on Enid of the Prince's declaration of his love—the fears of the poor maiden about her appearance at court, which haunt her even in dreams—the delight of the mother at the recovery of the gorgeous dress—her proud admiration of Enid's beauty when clothed in the splendid garment—and their silent compliance with the hard message that she was to go to Caerleon in the faded silk—are all beautifully told. But these passages are, doubtless, familiar to most of you; and I will, therefore, instead of dwelling on them, notice a change which Tennyson has introduced into this part of the story, by which he has increased both its clearness and its interest. In the original the young lord

who has built the new fortress in Yniol's town, and who has taken to himself Yniol's possessions, is a different person from the Sparrow Hawk. But Tennyson has with great judgment identified the two, thus removing an unnecessary complication, and binding more closely together the vengeance for the insult to Guinevere and the redressing of the wrongs which Enid's father had suffered.

The latter part of the first Idyll, which relates to the singular expedition of Geraint, arising out of his unjust suspicions of his wife, has been plausibly condemned as extravagant in conception, nay, even revolting, from the grossness of the indignity done to Enid. The true answer seems to be, that the elements thus criticised are of the essence of the old story—postulates, whose consequences the poet had to work out. The trials to which, in a celebrated tale which has its points of resemblance to this, the patient obedience of Griselda is exposed, may be justly described as excessive even to painfulness; and if Chaucer's version of it were challenged on that ground, I know not what we could reply, except that such was the legend, which the poet had to shape in minor particulars, but not to alter in its essence. Is not this, also, the justification we must offer of what may seem overstrained in the revenge of Shylock, or in the headlong rage of Lear against the daughter of his love? It may be observed that the motive for Geraint's strange journey, which is left obscure in the Idyll, is more clearly brought out in the original. The wife there is half overheard by her husband, saying to herself as she gazes at his recumbent

form, "Alas! and am I the cause that these arms and this breast have lost their glory and the warlike fame which they once so richly enjoyed?" Geraint believes that it is not in tenderness for him that she speaks thus, but because she loves another man, and wishes for another mate. Then he breaks out with the exclamation, "Evil betide me if thou returnest here until thou knowest whether I have lost my strength so completely as thou didst say; and if it be so, it will then be easy for thee to seek the society thou didst wish for, of him of whom thou wast thinking." It is, therefore, not altogether in a blind purposeless despair, but to prove to Enid that his arm still retains its accustomed prowess, that he goes forth to tempt all the snares and dangers of the lawless border region.

In the old tale, as in the modern poem, Geraint directs his wife to clothe herself in her worst and meanest dress, and Enid obeys the command. But here the poet has introduced an exquisite conception of his own, by which he brings into touching contrast the present and the past:—

"Then she bethought her of a faded silk,  
A faded mantle and a faded veil,  
And moving toward a cedarn cabinet  
Wherein she kept them folded reverently,  
With sprigs of summer laid between the folds,  
She took them and arrayed herself therein,  
Remembering when first he came to her,  
Drest in that dress, and how he loved her in it,  
And all her foolish fears about the dress,  
And all his journey to her, as himself  
Had told her, and their coming to the court."

I need not follow them as they ride through the peril-

ous paths of the "wild land," nor show how in the modern poem the combats of Geraint lose much of their exaggeration, and the consequent hardships of Enid much of the painful severity, which attached to them in the original. It is more important to remark on the admirably vivid pictures of Limours and Doorn, with the whole environment of each. Tennyson has interchanged the parts of these two actors in the story, and has greatly heightened the dramatic effect by making Limours to have been Enid's first wooer before the time of the Sparrow Hawk. How graphically this wild lord is described—

"Femininely fair, and dissolutely pale,"

with his high courtly bearing, covering the guile of the serpent! With what an easy grace he jests over his wine, and tells free tales—

"And takes the word and plays upon it,  
And makes it of two colours!"

With what plaintive sentimentality this Don Juan of those old ages whispers to Enid the story of his forgotten love; and with what high-flown courtesy—the courtesy of outward manner only, hiding under its sleek gloss the false and selfish heart!—

"Low at leave-taking, with his brandish'd plume  
Brushing his instep, bows the all-amorous earl."

Broadly contrasted with him is the coarse bandit Doorn—brawny in person, and brutal in soul. The scene in his hall seems to me as lifelike as Scott's picture of the fierce revelry in the hall of the Wild Boar of Ardenne. The lusty troopers entering noisily with the plunder—the women, half bold, half frightened, fluttering in wit

their gay dresses—the air dim with the steam of flesh, while the hungry spearmen feed like horses—all these are distinctly visible to us as we read. Then follows the touching conversation, in which the tender woman, lonely and helpless, is brought face to face with the lawless savage. And with what a flush of triumphant joy the pulses of the verse are filled, as the poet describes the happiness of the wife when the clouds of distrust have broken up, and she feels that she is now to Geraint more than she had ever been before!

“And never yet, since high in Paradise  
O’er the four rivers the first roses blew,  
Came purer pleasure unto mortal kind  
Than lived through her, who in that perilous hour  
Put hand to hand beneath her husband’s heart,  
And felt him hers again : she did not weep ;  
But o’er her meek eyes came a happy mist,  
Like that which kept the heart of Eden green  
Before the useful trouble of the rain.”

Of these scenes the original tale has, indeed, furnished the outline ; but the detail of incident, the depiction of character, the dramatic play of speech and action, are Tennyson’s own. He has wisely omitted some fantastic elements near the end of the story, and has substituted the high-toned passage in which we read of the self-conquest of Edyrn, and his conversion to gentleness and humility, and catch a glimpse of Arthur moving in stately progress through the outskirts of his territory, and bowing the stiff necks of the wild chieftains under the yoke of law.

In the second Idyll we have brought before us in the person of Vivian, a picture of the harlot nature, which

is willing for its own gain or glory to debase or destroy the object of its professed devotion. The tale of the magical secret told by the seer and employed to his ruin is in the old romance of Merlin. But we find there no trace of the moral significance which Tennyson has given to the story. Indeed, in the ancient version, the heroine, who is clothed with a supernatural character, is the object of a doting affection on the part of the seer, instead of, as in the poem, pursuing him with her wily blandishments. Another turn our poet has given to the tale, which is altogether his own, and well conspires to the general effect of Arthurian story. The lofty enterprises of the King were sure to be derided by the coarse and the frivolous of his time, just as modern materialism has so often sneered at mediæval chivalry. Now, the depreciation and mockery with which low natures pursue every high design—which are, as it were, the shadow cast by every great idea—are admirably represented by Tennyson in the cynical criticisms of Vivian: the truer, deeper verdict, which justifies and honours lofty aspiration and noble efforts, even when they are destined to fail, is expressed in the grave rebukes of the thoughtful and far-sighted Merlin. 'This Idyll is less popular than the others, doubtless because with neither of the actors is it possible to sympathise. So slight, spiteful, and impure is Vivian's nature that we do not feel the fascination to which Merlin succumbs. But there are in the poem many subtle traits of character; and, for richness of fancy, and a sort of fine dexterity and fairy delicacy of imagery, it is not, I think, surpassed by any of Tennyson's writings.

Next in the series of the Idylls comes the beautiful story of "Elaine." It is founded on another version of the legend which suggested to Tennyson, in the beginning of his career, the somewhat fantastic sketch entitled the "Lady of Shalott." The Idyll seems to me a very model of poetical story-telling; the easy, graceful movement of the narrative, the harmony and keeping of the whole and every part, leave nothing to be desired. The noble figure of Lancelot moves through the poem, at once grand and genial. Much of what was best in chivalry is represented for us in his person: his courtesy, with no tinge of hypocrisy in it; his simple dignity, with no element of disdainfulness; his frankness and manly pleasantry in the social circle; his tenderness for the fame and feelings of Elaine—prove him true knight and gentleman in every fibre. Yet, not so; for all is dashed and sullied by his guilty passion, which, in spite of frequent agonies of remorse, still holds him captive. By way of interlude, and in effective contrast with the larger and more imposing figure of Lancelot, we have a glimpse of the lithe and supple nature of Gawaine, with his sallying wit, his fine graces of the court, his golden eloquence and amorous adulation, but born of a crafty house, and with a strain of self-seeking duplicity running through the tissue of his character. Then we have the portraiture of the lily maid herself. Sacred for ever must be this fair and tender image to all who can appreciate purity and feel for unhappy love. Not a strong character is hers—rather one by nature formed of irritable fibre, and by early indulgence nursed into something of im-



patience and innocent self-will ; but capable of profound and self-sacrificing devotion. Brought into sudden contact with one whose noble manhood fulfils all her dreams of knightly greatness, and whose sweetly courteous bearing seems to encourage her fondness, she yields to him all the treasures of her young heart. When she hears of his wound, she cannot rest for sorrow and pity—

“She beholds him in her dreams  
Gaunt, as it were the skeleton of himself;  
Deathpale, for lack of gentle maiden’s aid.”

She hastens to his side ; she watches over him in his fever with patient forbearance and tender care. Sometimes her heart leaps up with the sweet thought that he may love her—but oftener the sad presentiment that it cannot be darkens her soul and fills her eyes with tears. And when at last hope is extinguished, she feels that for her life is over ; and death, in her bitter sorrow, is welcomed as a friend. In vain her father, meaning to break her passion, tells her of the public rumours about the guilty love of Lancelot and the Queen. She will not believe these stories—they *cannot* be true. She *knows* the man she has loved is the best and the greatest of God’s creatures ; and in that faith, in spite of slander, she will die. Even in the rude narrative of the old romancer, her character is beautifully pathetic ; but the poet has removed some coarsenesses, preserved all that was sweet and touching in the picture of the maiden, and thrown into it a heightened expression of innocence and pure devotion. It is not, I think, too much to say

of his "Elaine" that she is of the same family with the Violas, the Imogens, and the Desdemonas.

The selfish and capricious exactingness of Guinevere in this Idyll is brought into strong relief by being placed side by side with the pure passion of Elaine. Lancelot himself feels and confesses the contrast between her jealous pride and the self-devoting love of the maid of Astolat. There is something almost shocking to us in the contemptuous levity with which Guinevere speaks of her husband's noble nature. She sneers at his meekness—his straightforward simplicity—even at the unsuspecting trustfulness which she wronged so deeply ; and, echoing the mockeries of Vivian, derides the great enterprise of his life as the dream of a weak-brained enthusiast. In this treachery and heartlessness, we forget her unrivalled charm of manner, her queenly courtesy, her graciousness and condescension, and are led to contemplate without repugnance the retribution that overtakes her, and the sombre evening that closes her voluptuous day.

But whilst we are pained and hurt by the unwife-like and unworthy taunts directed by Guinevere against the King, they yet leave upon our minds a sense of flaw and disproportion in the character of Arthur. Indeed, I must in sincerity say that the picture of him presented in the Idylls is to me far from satisfactory. I am sensible of the nobleness of his nature, viewed from certain sides—but, considering him as a whole, I cannot recognize him as *flos regum* ; I cannot even help feeling some resentment against the poet for having marred and distorted the national type of heroic king-

hood. In an eminent temporal chief are required a certain breadth and robustness of character—a healthy sense of the real, the practical, and the solid; whilst Tennyson's King, whatever may be justly replied to the criticisms of Vivian and Guinevere, makes upon us the impression of a crowned ideologist, striving after Utopias, instead of calmly and strongly presiding over a world of facts. He is a masculine counterpart of the Lady Ida, who also had her Utopia, and, like her, is deficient in genial humanity, resembling rather

“ the inhabitant  
Of some clear planet close upon the sun  
Than of man's earth.”

The poet appears to have sacrificed Arthur to Lancelot. The warm and varied colour which plays about the latter is brought out more vividly by comparison with the white radiance in which the former is clothed. Perhaps a pure, cold exaltation seemed best to accord with the saintliness attributed to Arthur. But if such was the thought of the poet, he was certainly in error. This kind of tenuity and colourless pallor is by no means essential to sanctity, which can quite well accord with hearty life and a vigorous personality.

The position in which Arthur is placed of becoming acquainted with his wrongs only after they had been long the common rumour of the court, though to say the least undignified, was, perhaps, an essential element of the traditional story. But a painful idea is more than once suggested by the poet, that the King knew of this rumour, and was “vexed” by it, yet, unlike

Othello, was content to leave his doubts unresolved. He glances suspiciously at the Queen and her lover in the conversation about the tourney in the third Idyll, and even in friendly talk with Lancelot tells him that "the wild people say wild things of him," where from the context there can be no question what reports are present to his mind. It seems to me that this is to carry somewhat too far the generous forbearance of a noble soul.

The last Idyll differs from the others in this, that the poet here follows no original, but throws himself altogether on his own resources. There is no hint in the old romances of the meeting between Guinevere and the King; as they tell the story, it is after the disappearance of Arthur that the Queen retires to Almesbury—whereas in the poem what gives so solemn, almost awful a character to the interview, is, that he is just setting out for the great battle in the west, from which, as the voice of prophecy has taught him, he is destined never to return. The conversation between the Queen and the novice at the beginning of the Idyll is excellent. The little maiden, unconscious of the wounds she is inflicting, forces on Guinevere the thought of the blackness of her sin, and the deadly evil she has wrought to Arthur and the realm. Then, out of the very depths of her remorse rises the too-delightful recollection of the golden days when she first knew Lancelot; and the poet admirably describes the stately progress of her train when she rode with him to court as the King's affianced bride, and the sweet talk they held together then in the Maytime of their yet innocent

lives. I venture, with some hesitation, to express my imperfect satisfaction with the celebrated speech of Arthur over the prostrate form of Guinevere. In spite of the spoken forgiveness, there seems to me a cruel hardness in the tone; nay, more, there is a spirit of serene self-exaltation in his words, as of one who knew himself above temptation, and could scarcely be touched with the feeling of infirmity. And I will add, though what he says of the evil which springs from cloaking domestic sin is just in sentiment and finely expressed, it is too reasoned and systematic for the place where it occurs; and, further, it appears to be irrelevant in the circumstances--for it is applicable to cases where the guilt, not generally known, is screened by a husband's weakness, not to such as Guinevere's, where it was matter of public notoriety. All that follows the interview is excellent. There is something which greatly impresses the imagination in the view of Arthur, as dimly seen by Guinevere from the window, rolled about with the moony vapour, and becoming gray and grayer to her vision, as he "moves ghost-like to his doom." And the tone of our spirits is restored, and, after the sense of wrong and ruin, a holy calm seems to fall and brood about the closing scenes, where the sinful but repentant woman is seen humbly discharging the charitable duties of the cloister, and ere long, amidst the prayers of the pious sisters, passing

"To where beyond these voices there is peace."

In his last volume Tennyson has returned to the modern domestic Idyll, in which he had already given us the sunny luxuriance of the "Gardener's Daughter,"

the severe simplicity of "Dorn," and the serene sweetness and mingled humour and pathos of "The Brook." The first of these new Idylls is "Enoch Arden." I have observed that most readers of sensibility give their impression of this poem by the combination of the two epithets, "beautiful" and "painful;" the one referring to the treatment, the other to the theme. The story, indeed, is one which, in spite of all the grace and delicacy in Tennyson's rendering of it, yet wants intrinsic harmony, and contains much that jars upon the feelings. With Annie we can but imperfectly sympathise; we can at most forgive her for her second marriage. We cannot help suspecting that she is drawn into it in part by the temptation of escaping from her mean cares and drudgeries to ease and comfort; at best, without real wife-love for Philip, her weak nature is constrained to compliance by his urgency. A few words spoken by Miriam near the end of the poem throw a ghastly light on the mental attitude in which she is thus placed—

"If you could tell her you had seen him dead,  
Why, that would be her comfort."

She is haunted by an uneasy shuddering sense that Enoch may still live, and it is almost a necessity of her situation that she should wish him dead. Of Philip, too, do we not feel that there was a sort of desecration in his efforts to extinguish her shrinking presentiment, and to undermine her just dread of violating a holy tie? Was it a self-abnegation too high above him to have stifled the hunger of his heart, and continued to help

her in her struggle with hardship, without exacting his reward? And of Enoch himself may it not be asked, would he not have done better, making his great sacrifice, to have made it completely—to have left the village, and hidden his existence for ever out of sight, as in some versions of the story he is made to do? Was it even *natural*, superior as his strong character was to any sentimental weakness, that he should linger among scenes which forced in upon him torturing thoughts, and where he might at any time be brought face to face with the wife of other years? Why make known his identity after death? To comfort Annie, it is suggested, by the knowledge that he was indeed dead. To comfort her! Say, rather, to condemn her to life-long anguish when she was thus made to know that her true husband had indeed returned, and found his place filled—and died, almost at her door, of a broken heart. Surely the only possibility of an endurable existence for her lay, not in this heartrending certainty, but in the continued belief that he had been lost at sea. I cannot altogether suppress a feeling of indignation as I read the last two lines of the poem, meant apparently to signalise Philip's generosity:—

“And when they buried him, the little port  
Had seldom seen a costlier funeral.”

As if the paltry trappings of the hearse, or the tinsel on the coffin, could make us forget the bitter pains of that heroic nature, or hide from us the wounds of remorse which those terrible recollections must keep bleeding for ever in a true woman's heart.

There are, I think, these inherent weaknesses in the cast of the story ; but of the way in which Tennyson has rendered it, it is scarcely possible to speak too highly. It is, perhaps, the best specimen of his easy, well-ordered, luminous, finely-toned narrative. I am not struck by the artificiality and over-richness of ornament which some have professed to find in the poem : there is but one place where it does seem that too much is made of " pretty accessories " and the expression is a little cuphuistic—the passage, namely, in which Enoch is spoken of as selling his fish at the courtly mansions behind the village. The description of the tropical island is one of the most splendid things of the kind in our whole literature. Nor can it be justly objected that the gorgeous details of that picture are out of place because the rude sailor could have had no words for them, perhaps not even an explicit consciousness of them ; for, as has been well said, he had a " latent inexpressible conception of them." Nay, the very spirit and purport of the passage is to make us feel how the glories of the " beauteous, hateful isle," and the recurring pageant of morning, and noon, and evening, beat in, day after day, with monotonous magnificence on Enoch's brain and soul ; while to his seaward gaze never appeared the one object—the sail—for which his whole being yearned and hungered. Of character, too, there is some excellent delineation in this poem. In particular, the moral features of Enoch and Philip are presented throughout with great distinctness and consistency. Alike in early boyhood and mature life, the strong self-reliance and persistent purpose of the one



are well contrasted with the more refined but somewhat timid and faltering nature of the other.

A remarkable change in tone and manner meets us when we pass from "Enoch Arden" to "Aylmer's Field." In the former the stream of poetry flowed with continuous even current; in the latter it seems to rush over rapids of passion. That story the poet told as if he was looking back and sadly contemplating it in the distance: this he tells as if he had but lately heard it, and was still thrilling with the indignation it excited. The expression in "Aylmer's Field" is curt, allusive, abrupt, sometimes explosive. The metre, too, has a character of its own; the breaks in the lines are unusually frequent, and there is a dramatic laxity, as of impassioned conversation, in its whole structure. The story is the oft-told one of youthful love frustrated by aged worldliness. The meagre, prosaic lives of the old aristocratic pair, the sleepy monotony of their environment, and the formal narrowness of their ideas, are forcibly represented: and, in contrast with these, the delicate pensive beauty, the impressible open-mindedness, the tender human-heartedness of their daughter—an exquisite flower growing in the heart of an arid waste. Excellent, also, is the picture of Leolin, differing from her with that difference often seen in those who love—eager, impulsive, sanguine, taking "joyful note of all things joyful," flashing out suddenly in fiery rage against injustice and oppression. The figure of the East Indian, too, is vividly drawn—the keen, bold Sahib, who had seen much that was interesting, and could describe it well—who had done some daring

deeds in his day, but was a little too boastful in recounting them—strewing his gifts about with Oriental profusion—sickening after a time with inaction and *ennui* in his new English life.

The story reaches its crisis at the point where Averill delivers his sermon on the two deaths; and here, I confess, I do not feel unmixed admiration. Nothing could be finer than the part of the discourse where, in dwelling on the angelic ministrations of Edith, and the sad end of Leolin, he melts the hearers into tears, half of sorrow, half of indignation, and almost breaks down Aylmer's firmly guarded self-control. But the allusion to the French Revolution, conceived as then in progress, seems to me to harmonise ill with the context; the suggestion that the social aspect of the times made the action of the Aylmers impolitic, mars the effect of Averill's appeal to the instincts of the human conscience, which pronounce their conduct to be sinful. And when he goes on, in his fierce declamation, to fasten publicly upon the wretched parents the guilt of a double murder, my sympathy, I own, threatens to change sides: he gives too much the idea of a strong man, armed and secure, smiting with all his strength two feeble unresisting creatures. Who but must revolt against the preacher, when the poor old mother is carried insensible from the church, and the father, striving in vain to walk erect, and maintain the dignity of the Aylmers, reels in the aisle, and, amidst angry unpitying looks, gropes his way blindly to the door? It seems to me that the bow is here a little overdrawn. I think the aged pair might better have been left, without

Averill's violent intervention, to the natural punishment of their acts—the silent verdict in their neighbours' faces, the desolation of their home, and the extinction of their race.

Some of the minor pieces in this last volume are of the highest excellence. I can only glance at the beautiful and affecting picture of extreme old age which is given us in the "*Grandmother*;" and at the exquisite Greek grace and harmony of the "*Tithonus*." But I must say a word or two of the "*Northern Farmer*," which is one of the most remarkable of Tennyson's productions. It does not belong to what is called a high region of art, but it is perfect of its kind. It is an actual creation; no pale image of the man, the man himself is before us. It is the first decisive proof he has given—for to the seeing eye evidences were not wanting in his earlier works—of the possession of a rich vein of humour; and, like much of the best and truest humour, the poem is not without a serious and even mournful significance. Those who regret that Tennyson should have wasted his powers in the delineation of a coarse barbarian, show by the remark that they have missed the pathos of the piece. Not simply contemptible or odious is this *Northern Farmer*. He is one of the strong, genuine Anglo-Saxon workers, who have carried on victoriously the struggle of man with Nature. He, too, has been for many a year pulling crooked things straight, and making rough places plain. He has "*stubb'd Thornaby waste*;" he has turned his little bit of England from a chaos to a cosmos. And, with the instinct of an honest worker,

he shrinks from the prospect of his unfinished enterprise passing into the hands of a sham worker and a bungler. But here is the sad aspect of the case—which, after we have enjoyed the humour, looks out upon us from behind the comic mask—that, while this man has been doing faithfully the material work of England, he has had no part or lot in her intellectual and moral life. English culture has not awakened his powers; English religion has not redeemed him from animalism and moral torpor. The beaver instinct of industry has been developed in him; but the noble human aptitudes lie imprisoned in a horny sheath of insensibility. Then what grim satire—again not without pathos—in the view which is presented to us of the parson, “bumming like a buzzard clock” over the head of the Farmer, who does not know what he means, only vaguely thinks he is saying what he ought to say; and, by the deathbed of his parishioner, serenely devolving his professional commonplaces, which he has never himself realized, and which the strong sense of the ignorant but practical-minded man refuses to appropriate!

I have not yet said anything of the shorter lyric pieces of Tennyson. Yet he has produced about a dozen of these which, I think, are not surpassed by anything of their kind in our language. In the songs which are sung by the ladies in the intervals of the story of the Princess, various phases of the lot of woman, and her influence on man, are beautifully shadowed out, and clothed with appropriate feelings. “As through the land at eve we went;” “Her voice is heard ’mid rolling drums;” “Home they brought her warrior

dead;" these we more than admire—we have learned to love them. "Blow, Bugle, blow!" approaches, as near as words can do, to producing in us the half sensuous charm of music. "Tears, idle tears," utters the very soul of that vague melancholy which waits upon the memories of the past. We must not in general look to "*In Memoriam*" for specimens of the true lyric; for the most part, in that work the thinking predominates over the singing: but in some places the poet does really move in a clear lyric element; as in the beautiful verses in which he addresses the "fair ship" which was bearing to England the precious freight of the beloved remains. There are two exquisite separate snatches of song, which apparently rose out of the same sorrow which inspired "*In Memoriam*"—namely, "Break, break, break;" and the "Verses in the Valley of Caunteretz." Nor must we overlook, in this brief enumeration, the longer and more elaborate "*Ode on the Death of Wellington*," of which all but the closing part is excellent; and in which now the stately resonant march, now the vehement aggressive onset of the verse, harmonises finely with the changing aspects of the theme.

Let me, in fine, collecting the scattered lights which I have tried to throw on the successive creations of the poet, say a few words on the principal features of his genius and characteristics of his art. At the root of most of his excellences lies his keen sense and exquisite enjoyment of every species of beauty—of all that is lovely in form, or graceful in movement, or rich in colour, or harmonious in sound. His finely-tuned

organization seems tremblingly alive to those more delicate shades and tones of external nature which are scarcely distinguished by obtuser sensibilities. Connected with this gift is his power of painting the appearances of the outer world, not merely with general truthfulness, but with an almost magic reality of detail. Yet he does not fall—at least in his mature works—into pre-Raphacite excess. He is saved from this by his practice of presenting every aspect of nature, not simply as it is in itself, but in relation to human feeling. He shows us the landscape as it is seen by the actors in his poems, and the features he exhibits are selected with relation to their dominant emotions. His moral sensibilities are not less fine than his physical—he notes with accuracy the subtle play of feeling, and those minor involuntary indications which are its natural language. And often he brings out most effectively the character—or, might I say? the soul—of a situation by some slight fugitive trait—some evanescent touch of attitude, or gesture, or expression. He is a master of orderly and lucid narration; nothing is left hazy or indistinct in the stories he tells—everything is adequately prepared by previous explanations, everything is maturely worked out to its natural close. His language, grammatically and logically considered, is admirably pure and correct. It is, in some senses, singularly simple. It is quite free from what Coleridge called “pompous pseudo-poetic slang;” it is almost entirely without those forced inversions of phrase which give such a stilted and artificial air to poetical expression. His vocabulary is in a remarkable

degree Saxon; indeed, I am not sure that the great abundance of native monosyllables does not sometimes produce in his blank verse a certain effect of slightness and triviality. But, while his language is in these respects simple, it is also highly elaborate and richly adorned. The words are selected and disposed with scrupulous nicety; and you constantly feel that there is a subtle charm in his sentences which would be lost if the words were ever so little altered. With delicate instinct he rejects such forms of expression as have coarse or vulgar associations, carrying this indeed sometimes to purism; on the other hand, he often pleases by introducing homely phrases, which, while free from such taint, have a hearty honest worth and vital warmth about them. His style is not chargeable with misplaced or meretricious ornament; but when his sensuous imagination is strongly awakened, or vivid emotions demand an utterance, his language sparkles or glows all over with imagery; he does not so much seem to call in the aid of images to illustrate his conceptions as to express himself spontaneously in the language of images. His versification is in general the product of consummate art. His cadences are modulated in wonderful harmony with the swell and fall of the feelings. 'This has a fine effect in his lyrics, and all through "*Maud*," where the rhythm is adapted to the sentiment as body to soul. So also, in his narratives, almost every striking act or movement has a counterpart or echo in the structure of the verse. This is even carried, perhaps, beyond due limits, so as to suggest the idea of a too dainty elaboration. He has formed for

himself a blank verse which is essentially his own, and unlike that of any other English poet. True epic music he reached once in "*Ulysses*," and has approached elsewhere in isolated passages. But in general his blank verse wants the majesty and linked continuous flow which would make it suitable for the highest themes. It is well fitted to the middle tones of the domestic Idyll, which he seems to have chosen as the "main haunt and region" of his genius.

I have necessarily said much of Tennyson's art, for all that he does is finished with scrupulous care; he is never absent or slovenly; you always feel that you are in the presence of an intent artist, wide-awake, and concentrated on his task. But no judgment can be less just than that which I have sometimes met—which represents him as merely an artist—a cunning worker in literary mosaic and filigree, but destitute of moral earnestness. His writings produce in me quite the opposite impression. If I am not altogether wrong, he is as little a dilettante in feeling as in art. I find no falsetto in his sentiment, no histrionic attitudinizing for the sake of effect; and, so far from being indifferent to the great interests and movements of Humanity, it would be easy to show that he is, in a remarkable degree, sympathetic with the life of his age, and responsive to its intellectual and social impulses.

If in this view of his poetic character, shadows as well as lights ought to appear, they would probably be of the following kind. We find in him at times somewhat of over-elaboration; a want of naiveté and homely freedom. There is, perhaps, as in his own *Arthur*, a



lack of breadth and robustness ; the grace is too feminine, and there is too little of the manly bass in his music. His thought is rather subtle and piercing than capacious or profound. And the effect he commonly produces is rather that of refinement, delicacy, ingenuity, than of impressiveness, nobility, or grandeur.

But it is enough to indicate that a complete criticism of Tennyson would have its negative side. My wish to-day has been rather to fix your attention on his excellences, and on the many beautiful and precious things he has produced. He well deserves the wreath with which his country has crowned him. He has worthily fulfilled his mission. He has devoted himself to his art, and striven with honest effort to give us the best he could. He has ever sought, by presenting high ideals, and inspiring pure sentiments, to do the poet's noblest work—to raise us above ourselves—above vulgar aims, and selfish narrowness, and low-thoughted cares. The words which his great predecessor in the Laureateship spoke with just confidence of his own writings may not less truly be applied to Tennyson's:—"They will co-operate with the benign tendencies in human nature and society, and will, in their degree, be efficacious in making men wiser, better, and happier."



PALIMPSEST LITERATURE,

AND ITS EDITOR,

CARDINAL ANGELO MAI.

BY C. W. RUSSELL, D.D.

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*Palimpsest*





## PALIMPSEST LITERATURE,

AND ITS EDITOR,

CARDINAL ANGELO MAI.

**P**ROBABLY there are not many among those whom I have the honour to address who have not, at some time or other, had to exercise their ingenuity in deciphering a corrected or obliterated manuscript. The necessity constantly arises, even in familiar correspondence. Few writers are so faultless or so watchful, as not to commit an occasional slip; and, although some are honest enough frankly to repair the mistake by drawing the pen through the faulty word and replacing it by its true representative, a by no means uncommon course is to rub out, more or less perfectly, the first writing and write the after-thought in its place, or even simply to write the new words upon the top of the old ones, just as they first stood, and without any preparatory process of erasure. Some of the offenders of the latter class may probably have had to bear the remonstrance of their correspondents, or, if engaged in literature, of their

printers ; and it is by no means impossible that they may even have paid penalty in their own persons by finding it beyond their power, after some time had elapsed, to decipher their own untidy manuscript.

In such cases as these, however, it is the second writing which is to be deciphered. It is not often that one is required to reverse the process ;—to call back the vanished lines of the original writing, to disembarass the first letters from the new characters with which they have been overlaid, and to restore the word or sentence such as it first came from the writer's pen. It is only those whom curiosity may have prompted to make the trial, or those upon whom such a task may have devolved in the routine of business or of professional duty, that can fully appreciate its difficulty.

Most of us, I dare say, have met in works of fiction, or even in our own experience, amusing or painful instances of secrets discovered and unwitting revelations surprised under a too curious scrutiny of an imperfect erasure in some unlucky letter or memorandum. Comedies and romances without number have found the turning point of their plot in some such disclosure ; and the criminal records of all countries supply many instances of the equally unforeseen betrayal of daring and ingenious forgeries, alterations of dates or amounts, and other fraudulent tampering with the true import of wills, conveyances, and similar legal instruments. \*

Less has been popularly known regarding another field, in which the same skill of the decipherer has been employed for a more permanent object and with larger and more important results. I allude to its application.

especially by the celebrated Cardinal Angelo Mai, to the decipherment of the ancient re-written manuscripts known to the learned as Palimpsests. The labours of Cardinal Mai in this department of ancient letters, form, perhaps, the least among the real foundations of his fame; but they are so curious, and, in this country, so little known, than I have ventured to select them as the subject of this Afternoon Lecture. In the attempt to make popular a learned and somewhat obscure subject, I feel that I shall need all the kind indulgence of my audience.

It is hardly necessary to explain that the name "Palimpsest" is originally Greek, (*παλίμψηστος*, from *παλιν*, again, and *ψάω*, I scrape,) and literally signifies "re-scraped," or "re-polished;" being used in this sense to designate parchment or other writing-material from which writing had been effaced, and which was rubbed smooth with a view to its being written upon a second time. The practice of thus re-preparing parchment or papyrus, existed not only among the ancient Greeks and Romans, but also among the Egyptians. There was in use in Rome, under the name of Palimpsest, a kind of parchment or other writing-material, so prepared as to admit of writing's being easily effaced from it, and thus available either as a receptacle for rough notes, or as a scribbling-book for first drafts of more elaborate compositions. Cicero, in one of his letters to Trebatius, rallies his friend upon the over economical habit of writing to him upon palimpsest. It would even appear, from the language of this letter, that it was not unusual among friends to sponge out a correspondent's letter

when read, and to return the answer upon the same parchment; and Martial, in one of his epigrams,\* speaks of parchment tablets specially prepared so as to admit of being cleaned over and over again at pleasure. On the other hand, Catullus† amuses himself over the self-complacent vanity of Suffenus, a dabbler in verse, who—

‘Tam gaudet in se, tamque se ipse miratur—

was so satisfied with his own skill that he would not write his odes as others did, on palimpsest, for the revision of his friends, but had them at once sumptuously engrossed on royal paper, with new bindings, new bosses, crimson bands, and all the other appliances of fashionable authorship.

Nec sic ut fit in palimpsesto  
Relata: chartae regiae, novi libri,  
Novi umbilici, lora rubra, membrana  
Directa plumbo et pumice omnia aequata.

The practice continued, in a greater or less degree, under the later emperors; and there is a beautiful allusion to it in one of St. John Chrysostom’s Homilies,‡ in which he compares the mind upon which evil impressions had once been made to a palimpsest parchment in which, however carefully re-prepared, the old characters and lines are sure to appear peeping through the new writing. Nevertheless, during the classical period, its history possesses little practical interest; not a single manuscript, actually re-written in that period, has been discovered; nor, indeed, is there reason to suppose that,

\* xiv. 7.

† xxii. 5.

‡ Matth. xxvi. 4.

at least for books, the practice of re-writing on parchment was at that time much resorted to.

The ordinary writing-material of the Roman book-trade was papyrus, which, in the first centuries, notwithstanding an import duty, was so abundant and so low-priced as to render the use of palimpsest comparatively uncommon. But when, by the division of the empire, intercourse with the east became unfrequent and difficult, the scholars and scribes of the west, although the import duty was abolished, were thrown back upon the old expedient. And from the seventh century, when, by the Mahomedan conquest of Egypt, the papyrus-market was almost completely closed, we begin to meet with western MSS. the parchment of which had been previously written upon, wholly or in part. In the east, where the want of papyrus was not felt so soon, the practice of writing a second time on parchment did not become general till a later date; and in Greek palimpsests the second writing is hardly ever earlier than the eleventh or twelfth, and is often of the fourteenth or following century.

At the time at which the practice of re-writing was revived, the old literature still maintained its ground, and it may be presumed that a large proportion of existing MSS. must have been copies of the works of the popular authors of ancient Greece and Rome. Accordingly, when an author or transcriber of the new generation was compelled, in the dearth of fresh writing-material, to make use of old and already used parchment, washing and scraping it as best he could to remove the first writing, it must commonly have hap-



pened that the works which he subjected to the transformation belonged to the prevailing class; and thus that the defaced authors were for the most part Greek or Latin classics. If, therefore, we supposed that the practice became general in the period referred to, we should be led to expect that the original writing of the defaced and re-written parchments of this date would be found, if it were possible to decipher them, to consist in the main of remains of Greek and Latin literature, including probably not a few works which are now irrecoverably lost.

And such undoubtedly would have been the case, had, as unfriendly historians have represented, the mediæval scribes, in their indifference or hostility to classical literature, recklessly sacrificed the MSS. of the Greek and Latin classics, in order to provide parchment for the pious labours of the Scriptorium. The discussion of such a topic would be out of place in the neutral field which these Lectures are designed to occupy. Indeed this imputation against the monks, in the sweeping form in which it appears in several popular compilations, might well have been restrained by a candid recollection of the many splendid and unquestioned services of the monastic scribes to classic literature. I shall only say that it is one which no person at all acquainted with the subject of palimpsests would have made, and which the very condition of all the known palimpsest MSS. is sufficient to confute. Unfortunately for the chance of any wholesale recovery, through the medium of the palimpsest, of the lost literature of the ancients, there is not a single extant palimpsest from

the present condition of which it could be inferred that, when the MS. was taken in hand by the medieval scribe to be written upon a second time, it was, I do not say perfect, but in a state approaching even in the remotest degree to completeness. By far the greater number of extant palimpsests bear intrinsic evidence of having been already in a hopelessly mutilated state when selected for rescription. Some of the MSS. contain but a few re-written leaves in a whole volume of previously unused parchment: some, which are re-written throughout, contain portions of more than one ancient author. The palimpsest of Cassian's Conferences, deciphered by Mai, contained scraps of three Roman Jurists; the Barrett palimpsest a still greater number. A palimpsest MS. of one of St. Jerome's Commentaries mentioned by Mone consisted of seven different authors; and the MS. of the Acts of the Council of Chalcedon, from which Mai deciphered his Fragments of Cicero's Orations, included no fewer than eight. Even those deciphered palimpsests which approach in some appreciable degree to completeness, as the Cicero *De Republicâ*, or the "Historical Palimpsest" of Cardinal Mai, contained but a very small portion of the original work. In a word, from the miserably fragmentary condition of every known ancient work deciphered from a palimpsest original, not only is it plain that the MSS. of these works must have been incomplete before their defacement, but it is even highly probable that, in most cases, the original parchments must have been mere refuse, made up of scraps of imperfect copies of ancient writers already thrown aside by reason of their incom-

pleteness. Nay, there is good ground for believing that, like the papyrus-merchants at Alexandria, the medieval parchment-venders had a special trade in re-prepared parchment, which came to them in the form of refuse, like the waste paper of the modern book-trade. Scraps of palimpsest not unfrequently form part of the lining in the early specimens of bookbinding; and some of the first printed books, as, for instance, Jenson's *Constitutiones Clementinae* (1476), were printed entirely upon palimpsest parchment.

It will naturally be asked whether, if such be the condition of the ancient writing of the palimpsests, the results to be expected from their decipherment can be such as to justify the expenditure of time and energy which it involves. And undoubtedly, in the early days of the printing-press, when choice MSS. abounded in all the libraries of Europe, inviting by their very perfection the friendly hand of an editor, it was only to such MSS. that the attention of scholars was directed. It was confidently believed that, before many generations should have passed, the world would again possess, through the agency of the press, the whole body of ancient literature; and it is difficult now-a-days to repress a feeling of melancholy as we read in the prefaces of the various early editions of the classics, and especially as we glance in succession through them all, in the charming collection of them which we owe to the taste and enterprise of the late Mr. Beriah Botfield, the jubilant anticipations of the earlier editors and publishers, the Longmans and Murrays of the 15th and 16th centuries—Vindelín de Spira, Fröben, Nicholas Jenson, or Sweynheim

and Pannartz. But the produce of what may be called the first harvest of MSS. fell far short of these magnificent expectations. At the close of four centuries of the printing press we find ourselves in possession, it is true, of a precious body of Greek and Latin learning:—so precious, indeed, that few have troubled themselves to estimate how far it really represents the intellect of the ancient world. We are apt to limit our notion of ancient literature within the circle of a few great names, or of certain great collections, such as the Bipontine or the Delphin; and, although the fact is vaguely recognized that many works have perished, and that others have been grievously mutilated, yet it is only those scholars who have made the subject a special study that can thoroughly realize the miserably small proportion which the extant remains of Greek and Roman letters bear to the actual literature of the ancient world. There is no branch of either literature—Poetry, History, Philosophy, Oratory—in which deplorable blanks do not appear.

Let me glance at a few in each literature.

The remains of Greek poetry now in our hands do not constitute a tenth part of what the ancients possessed. Of the Greek Epic, Homer and Hesiod are the only representatives, although the so called “Epic cycle” comprehended no fewer than thirty distinct authors. Nearly all the early Iambic and Elegiac writers have been lost. To pass over the total disappearance of the more ancient Lyric poets, it will be enough to say that out of the nine who are enumerated by the Alexandrian grammarians of the second century before Christ, Pindar is the only one who can be said to be

tolerably represented. Even Anacreon, whom we might have expected to have been the most popular, and of whom, so late as the time of Suidas, five books were still extant, is known to us only by what the best critics now regard as unquestionably modern imitations. Of the once celebrated poetesses, Erinna, Sappho, Myrtis, and Corinna, all that remains are a few fragments of Sappho. The Greek Drama itself, long to moderns an object of almost superstitious worship, is most imperfectly preserved. Chærilus, who wrote a hundred and fifty tragedies, is utterly lost. So it is for Aristarchus, Xenocles, Agatho, and Euphoriion. Sophocles and Aeschylus, the former of whom produced one hundred and thirteen, and the latter seventy, or, according to Suidas, ninety tragedies, are known to us each by but seven. Of Euripides, who wrote seventy-five, or perhaps ninety-two plays, we have only eighteen. Of Greek Comedy, Aristophanes, of whose plays (originally fifty-four in number) we now possess eleven, may be said to be the sole representative. Menander is only known from his Latin imitators or translators; and of Eupolis, Cratinus, Epicharmus, hardly a fragment has been preserved.

In the class of historians, although Herodotus and the early Attic writers have been tolerably preserved, the later Greek writers of history, as I shall presently have occasion to state, have been sadly mutilated.

The orators have been almost equally unfortunate. Demosthenes, alone of them all, approaches nearly to completeness. For all the rest, as Lysias, Isacus, Isocrates, Aeschines, the extant orations bear but a small

proportion to those which have been lost; while of Dinarchus, copious as he was, we possess but three, and of the great Hyperides, not a single complete oration.

In philosophy, strange as it may appear, hardly a single original master of any of the early schools has escaped the general ruin. Even in the later only a remnant, although it be a precious one, has been saved. Stoics and Epicureans alike have perished. Notwithstanding the all-but adoring reverence in which Epicurus was held by his disciples, out of two hundred volumes which Diogenes Laertius ascribes to him the only remnant, until a few fragments were recovered a few years since from the Herculanean Papyri, consisted of four letters. Chrysippus, who rivalled and even surpassed the fertility of Epicurus, is said by Diogenes Laertius to have written 705 volumes. Not a single one has reached our day! Even of Plato, if we exclude the spurious or doubtful works, how little has come down to us! And the extant writings of Aristotle, the great text-book of the schools, hardly amount to one fourth of the 144,000 lines which the same historian of philosophy ascribes to him.

The wreck of Latin letters is hardly less deplorable. Tragedy never obtained a real footing in Rome, although we read of one author obtaining for a single tragedy a sum equivalent to £8000. But, with all the well-known popularity of comedy at Rome, how little do we possess of the Roman comic poets! Terence, the least prolific of its many writers, alone has escaped without serious mutilation. Afranius, Atilius, Turpilius, Tegula, are only known by name. The twenty plays of Plautus

may seem no mean monument of his genius, but they form a very small remnant of the 130 which he wrote. Of Statius's forty-five plays, not a single one has come down complete. Pacuvius, whose comedies numbered thirteen, and Attius who had produced as many as fifty, are equally unfortunate. Of the early satirists Lucilius has totally disappeared. I might cite a long list of writers of the epigram, not one of whom is now known except by some scanty fragments. And, although most of the poets of the Augustan and immediately succeeding age—Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Juvenal, Catullus, Tibullus, Propertius, Martial—have escaped with comparatively little loss, yet others hardly less popular, and among them Varius, who, if we may trust Horace's

Forte epos acer  
Ut Varius nemo ducit,

was superior even to Virgil as an epic writer, have perished utterly, and without leaving a trace.

It is still worse in Latin prose. Every one knows of the miserable mutilation of Livy and Tacitus. But the extent of destruction in other cases is seldom realized. Almost every Roman orator, except Cicero, has perished. Cato is represented only by a few fragments, if we except the very doubtful treatise on agriculture, "*De Re Rustica*," ascribed to him; and of the most voluminous of all Roman authors, Varro, whom Cicero describes as "*homo πολυγραφώτατος*," and who himself tells that his works numbered 490 volumes, only one single complete treatise and three books of another have come down to our day.

Such being, after all the best MSS. of the European libraries had been given to the world, the deplorably mutilated condition of the literature of ancient Greece and Rome, we need not wonder to find the first band of editors, whose labours had left so much still to be accomplished, succeeded by one and another series of gleaners, too glad to gather up what their more fortunate or more fastidious leaders had passed by or had thrown aside:—MSS. of minor note, imperfect MSS. ancient commonplace books, “*excerpta*,” “*catenæ*,” and other similar repertoires; and at last, all these having been in turn exhausted, carrying their researches into a still less accessible region. In the dearth of further resources, men bethought themselves at last, that, like those ancient cities of Italy and the East, which, through neglect, or the natural vicissitudes of time, or even the very necessities of modern civilization, had been covered up and forgotten, a forgotten world of letters might lie beneath that which another generation, actuated by new impulses and animated by new forms of thought, had been building up for itself during a long course of ages. That buried world of thought was found at last in the half-obliterated remains of the mediæval palimpsests.

Among the ancient parchments which had been defaced and re-written by the transcribers of the eighth and following centuries, some were copies of authors or works which had since entirely disappeared. In many of these curious literary relics the work of defacement had been imperfectly done. The poet’s “*Non omnis moriar*” had been in part, at least, realized; and



in the faint and attenuated lines which had survived the application of the sponge and the scraping-tool, and still showed dimly out beneath the new characters to which they had given place, it might seem as if, while the grosser external forms in which the intellect of the ancient world was embodied had perished or had been buried beneath the new creation as in a tomb, the more subtle spirit had still lingered, struggling as it were against annihilation, and, like some parted soul, still fondly clinging to the last mouldering relics of its earthly tenement. To call back those shadows of the past—to give shape and vitality to these dim and unsubstantial essences—and, by the magic power of science or of letters, to reproduce them in forms resembling in some degree those which they had once borne, is the task of the Palimpsest editor. And Angelo Mai is recognized by the grateful voice of Europe as the great enchanter of this world of the spirits of a departed literature.

It will be understood from these explanations that in a palimpsest MS. the chief, and perhaps the sole object of interest is the first or the more or less completely obliterated writing; and that the motive which inspires the energy of the explorer is the hope that its dim and half-vanished characters may possibly contain some precious monument of that ancient learning, the loss of which our generation has hitherto deplored. In relation to this inquiry the second writing has no direct interest. It may be, and in point of fact it has happened in more than one instance, that the intrinsic value of the modern MS. is very great; but to this the palimpsest edi-

tor steadfastly closes his eyes ; and he concentrates all his energy upon the effort to recover, as far as possible in their integrity, those relics of the ancient world of letters which lie beneath. Naturally enough, they are even the dearer because they had been lost ; and the literary explorer regards them with the same tender interest with which the Poet-pilgrim traces, in some of the seats of modern civilization, the relics of older cities once famous in story, and mourns that—

Time hath not rebuilt them, but upreared  
Barbaric dwellings on their shattered site,  
Which only make more mourned and more endeared  
The few last rays of their far-scattered light,  
And the crushed relics of their vanished might.

The existence of this buried world had, of course, long been palpable ; but its significance does not appear to have been even suspected ; and the first suggestion as to its probable value for the restoration of the lost literature of the ancients is due to the bold and far-seeing genius of the great Benedictine scholar Montfaucon. For nearly a century, however, the suggestion bore but little fruit. The hope of Montfaucon first became a reality in the hands of Jean Boivin, who, in a palimpsest in the Royal Library at Paris, discovered in a MS. the second writing, of which consisted of a work of St. Ephraim, those remains of a very old Greek text of the Old and New Testament, which Küster, and afterwards Wetstein, collated, and which Tischendorf has at last given fully to the world.

After an interval of half a century, a German scholar,

named Knittel turned to a similar account a palimpsest of the Wolfenbüttel Library, the first writing of which was found to contain large fragments of the Gothic version of the Bible by Ulphilas, bishop of the Goths in the fourth century. Some years later, Paul James Brunns discovered in a palimpsest of the Vatican a portion of one of the lost books of Livy (the 91st); and just at the end of the century, a still more interesting biblical relic, a large fragment of the Gospel of St. Matthew (chaps. i. 17 to xxvi. 71) was discovered in the library of our own university, and was edited from a most curious palimpsest, by our own fellow-countryman, Dr. Barrett, Vice-provost of Trinity College, Dublin.

This was the sum of the results of palimpsest exploration up to the time of Angelo Mai. I can but glance at the leading facts of the modest, but, for ancient literature, ever memorable career of this illustrious man. He was born, March 7th, 1774, at Schilpario, a mountain-village of that lovely district of Bergamo, which Manzoni has made interesting to countless readers in every country by the charming description in his "*Promessi Sposi*." From the school of his native village Mai was selected, in 1799, with four companions, to take a part as a novice in the tentative effort for the restoration of the suppressed order of the Jesuits at Colorno, in the Duchy of Parma, which was undertaken in that year with the approval of Pope Pius VI; and, in 1804, when the Society was more formally restored for the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, he was transferred, as professor of Greek and Latin literature in the new school of the order, to Naples; thence to Rome, and finally to Orvieto,

where he received the holy order of priesthood. Returning to Rome, in 1808, he found himself compelled, by an order just issued by Napoleon for the return of all subjects of the Italian kingdom to their native provinces, to relinquish his Roman home; and, as the Society was still under the decree of suppression in the kingdom of Italy, it was considered expedient to release Mai from his engagements, so that he returned to Milan as a simple ecclesiastic, and soon after was admitted as an associate, and eventually a doctor, of the celebrated Ambrosian Library of that city.

From this point the history of Mai forms part of the history of ancient letters. His first independent publication was a Latin translation, in 1813, of an Oration of Isocrates, the original of which had just been printed for the first time; and it was in the following year that he entered upon his career as an editor of palimpsests.

It may be convenient, however, for those who have never seen a palimpsest MS. that I should now give some notion of the character and appearance of these curious literary relics, and some idea of the nature of the task which falls to the lot of their editor. With a view to enable you to accompany the explanation with more facility, I have had diagrams executed, which will present on a large scale the more simple forms of palimpsest, but in which the distinctness of the old writing is much exaggerated, in order that it may be visible at a distance. I have also had photographs prepared, nearer to the actual dimensions, which shall be sent round for inspection, and which may

suggest more vividly the real difficulties that in many cases await the decipherer.

But in order to make the subject more intelligible, it is necessary to call attention to certain particulars in which ancient MSS. differ from modern, both as to their material, that is, the substance on which and with which they were written, and as to their execution. Of the writing material it will be enough to say that, although no inconsiderable number of palimpsests on papyrus have been preserved, yet the material of all the great palimpsests of literature has been parchment; and that, although some examples of ancient parchments of very exceptional fineness have been recorded,—as that of the *Iliad*, which, if we may believe Pliny, Cicero saw compressed into a walnut shell,—yet in general the parchment of the ancients was substantially identical in character with our own.

It was not so, however, for the ink. The ink of the ancients was of three kinds, of which, however, only the first was in general use. It was called *atramentum scriptorium*, and perhaps might better be described as a pigment than as a modern ink. The blackening ingredient of this atramentum was the fine carbon deposited by the smoke of resin, pitch, and other similar combustible matter, including the wood of the resin pine. It was of much thicker consistency than the ink of the moderns; and we can hardly wonder, on first thought, to find the dull writer in Persius throwing the blame of his own slow conceptions on the clamminess of his ink:—

Et queritur crassus calamo quod pendeat humor,  
Nigra quod infusa vanescat sepia lymphâ.

It was used, however, with a split reed, from the coarse point of which it flowed as readily as our attenuated ink passes from the finer point of the modern quill or steel pen; and an inkstand discovered at Herculaneum, still, after so many ages, contained ink sufficiently fluid to be written with. A second kind of ink was of vegetable composition, and was made by a process not well explained, from the lees of wine; sometimes, it would appear, with an admixture of the carbon already described. The third kind of ink, the μέλαν of the Greeks, was of animal origin, and had for its chief ingredient the fluid emitted by the cuttle-fish (*sepia*), and, according to some, the blood of the same fish. For each of these inks a different process is required in deciphering the palimpsest.

Perhaps I ought also to advert to certain specialities of ancient writing for which a modern may not be prepared. I do not mean as to the form of the characters, or as to the peculiarities of individual writers. The former, as varying from age to age, would involve almost endless explanation; and the latter, however curious it would be in itself,—however, for instance, it might amuse you to be told that Cicero's friend Atticus wrote a beautiful hand, while Cicero's own letters were so illegible that he is obliged to shelter himself under the excuse to which I fear too many of ourselves have at times been driven, of a “wretched pen,”—nevertheless appears of no practical importance for our present purpose, when we remember that, among the ancients, the manuscript of books was by no means the manuscript of the author, but the work of professional writers, of whom, as a

modern publisher maintains an establishment of pressmen, readers, compositors, and other working printers, the ancient publishers maintained a numerous and practised staff, whose writing, as far as possible, was uniform, and was regulated by the nature and price of the work which they were employed to produce. It is to be borne in mind, too, that, as the ancients did not possess any provision against weak sight or the failing vision of advancing years, which the modern spectacles supply, it was often thought necessary to provide for the wants of all classes of readers by characters of a size which (as may be seen in the diagrams before you, where the faint lines represent the original writing of the MS.) is quite beyond the proportions with which the modern eye has been familiarized. Lastly, it must be remembered that in the ancient writing there was no separation of syllables, words, or even sentences. An ancient MS, although broken by occasional paragraphs, presents in other respects one uninterrupted series of letters,—not separated into words, undistinguished by initial capitals, unparted by marks of punctuation, and destitute of every one of the conventional signs by which, in a page of modern print, the eye is enabled at a glance to identify each idea with its representative word. To a reader who has had no experience of ancient MSS. this is a most formidable difficulty. Let even the most accomplished Latinist or Greek scholar make the experiment for the first time, under the most favourable circumstances; let him try to read off at sight one of the continuously printed Greek or Latin inscriptions in Muratori or Aringhi, or even in the luxurious page of Mommsen or De Rossi,

and he will be able to form some idea of the degree to which an embarrassment, which, even with all the advantages of clear and well-formed type, is formidable, must aggravate the inherent obscurity of the half-obliterated characters of a palimpsest.

So much of explanation as regards the primitive writing of the ancient parchment which may have formed the basis of a palimpsest. We have now to see how, as regards the feasibility of decipherment, it is affected, first, by the more or less complete obliteration of the characters; secondly, by the overlaying of the new writing; and, lastly, by the rearrangement of the MS. in a new volume, in which the original subject is entirely lost sight of and forgotten, and in which the sole consideration of the scribe, the binder, and the destined reader, is for the new work for which the old one has been displaced.

First, as to the effacement of the original writing, it is to be understood that, under ordinary circumstances, there were two methods, the wet and the dry. In the first the surface of the parchment was moistened and carefully washed with a sponge, after which it was suffered to dry, and gently but firmly rubbed with pumice stone. But in the dry method recourse was had to the scraping tool, sometimes so as to scrape off the entire surface, and, as it were, to renew altogether the face of the parchment; sometimes confining the operation to the characters, so as merely to follow the course of each letter, and to efface these without interfering with the rest of the surface. The former process, when carried out with care, is commonly fatal to the chance



of deciphering the original; but the latter process, unless the new writing chance to have fallen unfavourably on the page, often presents to the decipherer the most favourable of all the conditions of success. In most cases, whatever may have been the process, the defacement of the letters is found to be so great as to necessitate the use of some chemical treatment in order to revive them. When the ordinary atramentum was used, a simple washing with infusion of galls is generally sufficient; but for the other inks the use of dilute muriatic acid, followed by prussiate of potash, is required; and in the case of sepia, or other animal ink, it has sometimes been found necessary to boil the parchment in oil in a close vessel heated to 400° R.

Such were the different methods of defacing MSS. among the ancients, with a view to writing a second time upon the parchment. The next point for the consideration of the intending decipherer of a palimpsest is the position and the character of the new writing with which the old has been overlaid; and this, I may state, presents almost endless varieties. Perhaps the most favourable form of all for the chances of decipherment is exhibited in the first of the diagrams now submitted to you, which is taken from a facsimile of the celebrated Vatican palimpsest of the "*De Republicâ*" of Cicero. In this instance the original writing was of large size. The parchment was washed, scraped, and rubbed smooth, the new writing follows the same order and direction as the old, and, although heavy, falls for the most part in the spaces between the lines. This, however, is the most simple form of palimpsest; the

decipherer must be prepared for many complications. Sometimes the original paper is turned upside down, as shown in the second diagram, which is from the palimpsest of Cicero's "Oration on Milo's Debt," published by Cardinal Mai; sometimes the new MS. is written at right angles across the original, as in the Barrett palimpsest, a singularly fine specimen of its class, which may be seen in one of the show cases of our University Library. Sometimes, while the original page was in columns, the new writing is carried continuously across the page; and, most perplexing of all forms, not unfrequently the new writing follows precisely in the course of the old, line for line, and almost letter for letter, as may be seen in the photograph marked No. 2.

In all this, however, we have been considering cases in which the MS. has been but once overwritten; but the palimpsest editor has sometimes to deal with the far more perplexing contingency in which there are not two but three, and even four tiers of writing. One of the Syriac MSS. in the British Museum, examined by Dr. Tischendorf, is a palimpsest of some portions of the Gospel of St. John in Greek, which has been twice in succession written over in Syriac. In the Codex Ephremi already referred to, although the general body of the MS. has been but twice written, there are, besides, occasional corrections of the first writing in three successive hands.

The palimpsest of Granus Licinianus, of which a facsimile is shown in the photograph No. 1, has been twice written over, the first time in Latin, the second

time in Syriac. In these cases the diversity between the languages of the old and the new MS. serve in some degree to diminish the confusion ; but in the thrice written palimpsest of the "Institutes of Gaius," deciphered by Niebuhr at Verona, all three writings are in Latin, and the characters of the first and second writings are strikingly similar to each other.

I must dismiss very briefly the third class of difficulties, those created by the disturbance of the order of the palimpsest, consequent on the taking asunder of the original for re-writing and the re-arrangement of the leaves when forming the new work. The confusion of the original which must ensue will be at once apparent ; and if any one will, on the one hand, consider how difficult it would be for the most accomplished scholar, even with all the advantages of print, to re-arrange in the sequence of matter and to assign to their respective authors a number of unnamed and fragmentary pages of various periods and subjects in his own language ; and will remember, on the other, that, in the process of providing material for a palimpsest MS, not only were the re-prepared sheets thrown into a completely new order, but different MSS. were joined confusedly together ;—the original sheets being altered in size and in form, the old marks of connection and sequence being removed, and larger breaks and gaps being created by the destruction or disappearance of many portions of the original ;—he will be able to appreciate in some degree the merit of such a success as that whose fruits we still enjoy in the clear and masterly order of the recovered fragments of the "De Republicâ," as edited by Cardinal Mai.

These hurried and imperfect explanations will prepare you to understand the nature of the pursuit upon which the young Mai was entering, when his attention was first attracted by a number of MSS. wholly or in part re-written. These MSS. had originally come from the Library of Bobbio, an ancient Benedictine monastery founded by our sainted countryman, Columbanus, and the home, during a long series of centuries, of many an Irish monk and pilgrim to the tomb of the Apostles. Mai was not long in ascertaining the importance of the contents of the first writing of these MSS, and he applied himself at once to the task of deciphering them. To enumerate his successive publications, beginning in 1814 with *Fragments of unpublished Oration of Cicero*, would be to place before you little more than a mere catalogue of names:—*Fronto*, *M. Aurelius*, a lost comedy of *Plautus*, *Porphyrus*, *Philo the Jew*, *Eusebius*, *Ulphilas's Gothic version of the Bible*, the *Sybilline verses*, and other works which appeared in quick succession during the five remaining years of his residence in Milan. I prefer to devote the little time which remains to a brief account of the two publications which are most remarkable, the “*De Republicâ*” of Cicero, and the so-named “*Historical Palimpsest*.”

Both of these, however, belong to a later period of Mai's life. In the year 1819, he was invited to Rome to fill the congenial office of First Keeper of the Vatican Library. Thenceforward the Eternal City was the scene of his labours; and, although he passed successively through a series of onerous and responsible offices to the crowning dignity of Cardinal, he never ceased till his

lamented death, in 1854, to devote every moment of leisure to his beloved studies.

It is a curious illustration of the strange vicissitudes through which the learning of the ancients has reached our time, that one of Mai's earliest discoveries at Rome was of a missing portion of the very palimpsest from which he had already edited the letters of Fronto at Milan. But the first real fruit of his Vatican researches was the celebrated "*De Republicâ*" of Cicero, his well-known treatise on the best form of government. Perhaps there is not in the whole range of classic letters a single book the loss of which had been to scholars of every age and class a subject of so lively regret. It was looked to as the oracle of the political wisdom of the ancient world, uniting in the highest perfection all that is best in theory with all that is most judicious in practice—tempering the refinements of a too speculative philosophy with the sage results of the long and varied experience of the storms of such a life as that of Cicero. There is not one of Cicero's works regarding which he has himself left us more interesting particulars. His letters to his brother Quinctius and to his friend Atticus, are filled with his speculations and his plans as to the composition of his book. In one of these we find him doubting whether he shall make it a didactic essay written in his own person, or shall cast it in that form of dialogue which Plato had made popular, and which he himself had already used with such effect in his book "*De Finibus*," the previous year. In another he is undecided whether, in case he should follow the form of dialogue, he shall make himself and his own

contemporaries and friends the speakers, or shall adopt—which he really did choose—the form of an “imaginary conversation,” in which the speakers should be the great men of an earlier generation. He changes his plan more than once as to the number of interlocutors and other details of the conversations. At one time he is so filled with a sense of the delicacy and difficulty of his task, that he talks of throwing it up altogether, and in the end he expresses his determination, should he not, on its completion, be satisfied with the result, to fling it into the sea. What had been the judgment of antiquity as to the result is known from innumerable testimonies, from Seneca, Pliny, Fronto, Gellius, Macrobius, from the Christian writers, SS. Ambrose, Jerome, Pope Liberius, and, above all, Lactantius and Augustine; to the latter of whom the “*De Republicâ*” is thought to have suggested the idea, although not the form, of his own “*De Civitate Dei*.” But from that period, or at least from the age of St. Isidore of Seville, the work unaccountably disappears; and the only certain trace of its existence for several centuries is a letter of the learned Pope Sylvester II, written, while he was still a monk, to his scholar Constantine, directing him to bring with him on his journey the “*De Republicâ*” of Cicero. As Gerbert soon after this was actually a resident of Bobbio, it is not absolutely impossible that the fateful volume now in the Vatican may be the identical copy which formed the subject of this request. However this may be, Gerbert’s appears to be the latest certain notice of the existence of the work. It was sought for in vain by numberless scholars and collectors

in later centuries. Petrarch, at the instance of the accomplished and munificent Pope, Clement VI, in vain explored all the libraries within his reach. Poggio was equally earnest and equally unsuccessful. The learned Greek Cardinal, Bessarion, expended a thousand gold crowns in the effort to recover it. Rumours of its existence were constantly circulated, and had just enough of plausibility to keep inquiry alive. Late in the sixteenth century scholars were still tantalized by stories of copies to be found, at one time in England, again in Germany, and even in Poland. On a search in the last-named country our own Cardinal Pole expended no less than 2,000 crowns; and so late as the Thirty Years' War, there was a story of a copy having perished in the destruction of one of the monastic libraries. But even these faint and flickering gleams of hope had died out before the day when Mai discovered the now famous Bobbio palimpsest.

The book itself, as published by Cardinal Mai, is so well known that I need not enter into any account of its character or contents. Our only present concern is with the manner of its decipherment. The second writing of the palimpsest, of which a specimen is exhibited in the dark letters of the diagram, was St. Augustine's commentary on the Psalms; and from the size, and (when revived by the preparatory treatment) comparative distinctness, of the original characters, the mere task of deciphering it presented far less difficulty than most of Mai's earlier experiments. But the facility thus afforded was more than outbalanced by the disorder, and, in some parts, the mutilation, of the sheets of

the original. Having been taken asunder for re-writing, they had of course been re-arranged solely by the order of the new manuscript, without the slightest reference to that of the original "*De Republicâ*;" and thus the only guide in restoring the original order was the sequence of matter, as determined by the learning and the critical sagacity of the editor. It is under this aspect that the "*De Republicâ*" exhibited most strikingly the marvellous gifts of Mai. The first and second books proved tolerably complete, and in these the sequence could be satisfactorily traced; but for the rest, the palimpsest only presented a series of disjointed and unidentified fragments. In order to eke out these, Mai collected from all available sources every known passage of the work which had been preserved, whether by Christian or by pagan authors; and the skill and ingenuity with which he marshalled them all, assigning all to their several places and dovetailing each into its fitting connection, and the erudition with which he illustrated the whole, raised him at once to the first rank as a commentator and a scholar.

This reputation was well supported by the collection of "*Fragments of Ante-Justinian Roman Law*," which he published soon afterwards. I prefer, however, to notice, as better illustrating the specialities of his peculiar province, his celebrated "*Historical Palimpsest*." Unlike that of the "*De Republicâ*" palimpsest, the original writing of the "*Historical Palimpsest*" is more than ordinarily minute. In it, too, the second writing lies directly upon the lines of the original, and to an unskilled eye seems inextricably mixed up with it; as may be



seen in the photograph of a passage from Diodorus Siculus, one of the authors most largely restored by this curious discovery. The whole MS. consists of 354 pages, each containing 32 lines, similar to those of the photograph. The ink of the ancient writing, moreover, has faded, even beyond the ordinary shadowiness of the palimpsest. Even Mai confesses that, although no tyro in such labour, he at first despaired of success; and it was only by taking advantage of the brightest hours of the brightest days, by resorting to the use of the most active chemical agents, and by employing the aid of the most powerful lenses, that it was possible to proceed with the decipherment.

It was early apparent to Mai that the original of this perplexing palimpsest contained extracts from Polybius, Dion Cassius, Diodorus, and other Greek writers of Roman history; but it was not till after long examination that, by one of those happy conjectures which seem natural to the true critical mind, he identified it as a portion of a vast collection—a sort of encyclopædia, or rather a literary commonplace book, which had been compiled at the instance, and in part under the direction, of the learned Emperor of Constantinople in the tenth century, Constantine Porphyrogenitus, “the Purple-born,” in whose personal scholarship, as well as munificent patronage of letters, we see almost the last gleam of expiring enlightenment in the Eastern empire. The work originally consisted of extracts from writers in every department of literature, arranged, according to subjects, under fifty-three heads or titles. Of these “titles,”

however, all except two had been lost, and the Vatican MS. was found to contain a third, entitled *De Sententiis*, "On Sentences," and consisting of extracts from Polybius, Diodorus Siculus, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Dion Cassius, Appian, Dexippus, and Eunapius, as well as from Xenophon, Arrian, Procopius, and Theophylact. The last four authors were already well known; but the recovery of any portion of the works of Polybius and the rest was a signal favour of fortune. There is not one of them whose works, as they have reached our age, are not miserably incomplete. Out of the forty books of Polybius, and the same number of Diodorus, we possess but five of the first and fifteen of the second. Nearly one half of the History of Dionysius is lost; more than half of Appian. Out of the eighty books of Dion Cassius hardly twenty-five remain; and the histories of Dexippus and his continuator, Eunapius, have almost completely perished. Now of these long-lost authors Cardinal Mai's palimpsest has restored to us, it is true in a fragmentary form, but yet in a pure and satisfactory text, upwards of five hundred quarto pages.

And difficult and toilsome as the work of decipherment must, from what is before your eyes, have been, this was but the least of the difficulties of the editor. Even after, with infinite toil and exemplary patience, the three hundred and fifty-four pages of the MS. had been deciphered and copied, line by line, and letter by letter, "it remained," says the distinguished scholar himself, "to separate the several authors who were jumbled together in inextricable confusion and disorder;

to distinguish each from the others, as well as to marshal the extracts of each in the order of his own history; to dispose the leaves of the MS. in their proper places and, finally, to put together once more the sheets which the modern copyist had formed into new combinations.' "And, lo!" he writes in another place, "a new and most embarrassing difficulty! The extracts of the several authors were scattered here and there in the palimpsest; the name of the writer or the title of the book seldom appeared; there were no marks of the sheets, and innumerable gaps occurred in the text partly from the very plan of the compilation, partly from the difficulty of deciphering the original writing. And fortunate indeed would it have been if the sheets had even been distinguished by numeral marks; but these having been originally omitted through accident or by the fault of the transcriber, there was no means of rearranging the extracts but by the exercise of my own judgment. On this alone, as Ariadne on her clue, had I to rely, in disentangling myself from the doubtful and tortuous mazes of the labyrinth."

And, in estimating the difficulty of thus determining the authorship of the several extracts by the sense alone, it must further be remembered that three, or perhaps more of these authors, had written upon the same history and even the same period of that history. Take a parallel case from English literature. Fox, McIntosh, and Macaulay have each written in part upon the same period—the Revolution of 1688. Suppose that a number of pages or fragments of pages were put before us, described as containing extracts of these

three histories of the Revolution, and that any one of us were called on to reassign each page to its own author, and to reconstruct all three histories, so far as the fragments of each would permit;—which of us, although the peculiarities of each of these authors are marked enough, would be so bold as to undertake the task? And yet how infinitely does it fall short of the difficulty which was before Mai in reconstructing, for example, the narrative of the Punic War, as it is related by Diodorus, by Appian, and by Polybius in the fragments comprised in the *Historical Palimpsest*!

This was the last important success of Mai as editor of palimpsests. I would gladly advert to the labours of those who have followed in his path; among whose works the most remarkable are the “*Homeric Palimpsest*” of Dr. Cureton, the “*Institutes of Gaius*” by Niebuhr, and the “*Annals of Gaius Granus Licinianus*,” deciphered from a thrice-written palimpsest by the younger Pertz. Of the last of these a facsimile is presented in one of the photographs submitted for inspection. But time will not permit that I should enter into any details regarding these publications, or, what I should still more desire, regarding the palimpsests of the many ancient Greek texts of the Old and New Testament, for which Biblical Literature is indebted to the industry and learning of Dr. Tischendorf.

The publications of Cardinal Mai in other departments of ancient literature, sacred as well as profane—Greek and Latin fathers, commentators, historians, poets, grammarians, lexicographers—and his celebrated

“Codex Vaticanus,” might well form the subject of a separate address. The several series of these publications—the “Vaticana Collectio,” the “Classici Auctores,” the “Spicilegium Romanum,” the “Nova Patrum Bibliotheca,” and the posthumous “Codex Vaticanus,” form in the whole a collection of twenty volumes in quarto and twenty in octavo. And when we remember that, in producing this enormous collection, Cardinal Mai worked literally alone—himself deciphering every MS, transcribing every copy with his own hand, arranging every sheet, examining and collating every doubtful reading, executing every translation, preparing every commentary and illustration, even delineating with his own pencil the facsimiles which accompany the several volumes;—that all this gigantic labour was but the extra-official occupation, almost the recreation, of a busy life, otherwise engaged by grave and important official duties, which he discharged with scrupulous exactness and fidelity;—that during several years of the most prolific period of his literary life he held the laborious and engrossing office of Secretary of the Great Congregation de Propagandâ Fide, the centre of the vast missionary system of the Catholic Church, with its countless ramifications in every part of the habitable globe;—and that during this tenure of office no correspondent, however humble, had to complain of a communication unacknowledged, no applicant, however importunate, was able to allege that his audience was deferred or unduly brought to a close;—we shall be enabled to appreciate in some degree the untiring energy of this great man as a literary worker, and his devotedness as a Christian prelate and priest.

In concluding this imperfect sketch, I cannot refrain from mentioning, as an illustration of his truly noble character, which united in rare combination enlightened love of learning, meek and unostentatious piety, and genuine Christian benevolence, one of the provisions of his last will, which he himself wrote with his own hand a few months before his death. After securing to all the various members of his household a provision during life, proportionate to their respective times of service, he bequeathed to the poor of his native village the whole residue of his property, which consisted chiefly of his magnificent collection of books. He directed that these loved and valued friends of so many years should be sold at a valuation; but he made it a condition that they should be kept together as a permanent collection; and, desiring to secure them for the Vatican library, he gave orders that, straitened as were at that period the resources of the Holy Father, the books should be offered for the acceptance of his Holiness at half the amount of the actual valuation. So that while his first thought was for the material wants of God's poor, he also remembered that "not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God;" and he tried to combine with his intended provision for the requirements of the body that inner intellectual nutriment by which the life of the mind is maintained from age to age, and which, elevated and purified by religion, is the food of true civilization, and the animating and directing principle of the highest instincts of our race.

The monument of Cardinal Mai, in the church of

his title, St. Anastasia, is one of the most interesting works of modern art in Rome. The lover of letters will probably regard the hall of the Vatican, in which the Mai Library is enshrined, as a still more interesting memorial of his genius. But I cannot help believing that, although his other services have conferred more substantial benefits upon letters, his most lasting claim on the remembrance of posterity will be under that title by which the Royal Society of Literature, in presenting him with its gold medal, in 1824, commemorated his great achievement—*Angelo Maio, Palimpsestorum Inventori et Restauratori* ;—

• ANGELO MAI, DISCOVERER AND RESTORER OF PALIMPSESTS.



THE HISTORY OF THE  
ENGLISH SONNET.

BY HIS GRACE THE ARCHBISHOP  
OF DUBLIN.









## THE HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH SONNET.

**I**AM well aware that the Sonnet is not with the great multitude even of those who are readers and lovers of poetry, a popular form of composition ; that there exist many prejudices against it ; and certainly, when I call to mind all the bad Sonnets which have been written, I cannot very much wonder that such prejudices should exist. Still I am persuaded that they are unfounded ; that they rest on imperfect knowledge ; that this form of verse is capable of being, has shown itself well fitted to be, the vehicle of the loftiest thoughts, the tenderest, or the most impassioned, emotions ; that there is an amount of the one and of the other of these embodied in this form, from which none, capable of enjoying true poetry, should willingly cut themselves off. For, indeed, the mightiest poets, whether of Italy, where the Sonnet first saw the light, or of our own land, not urged thereto by any necessity, but of their own free choice, have one after another chosen this form of

verse in which to embody and preserve some of their very choicest thoughts. In Italy, Dante, Petrarch, Michael Angelo, and Tasso, not to speak of secondary names, have all found their pleasure therein ; while in our own land, where alone in the modern world names could be found to match with these, to equal, perhaps to excel them, Spenser, and Shakespeare, and Milton, and Wordsworth, have not delighted in it less. He whom I have named the last of these—Wordsworth, I mean—conscious of the slight under which the Sonnet lay, a slight which his own magnificent compositions in this kind might fitly remove for ever, has written a Sonnet in defence of the Sonnet, reminding us of the many poets who loved it, and found in it the casket in which they were pleased to treasure some of the very best which they had. Let me open my pleadings in behalf of the Sonnet by reading this poem ; and this, although it perforce enumerates very much the same names which I have enumerated already :—

“ Scorn not the Sonnet ; Critic, you have frowned,  
Mindless of its just honours. With this key  
Shakespeare unlocked his heart ; the melody  
Of this small lute gave ease to Petrarch’s wound ;  
A thousand times this pipe did Tasso sound ;  
Camoens soothed with it an exile’s grief ;  
The Sonnet glittered a gay myrtle leaf  
Amid the cypress with which Dante crowned  
His visionary brow ; a glowworm lamp,  
It cheered mild Spenser, called from Faery-Land  
To struggle through dark ways ; and when a damp  
Fell round the path of Milton, in his hand  
The thing became a trumpet, whence he blew  
Soul-animating strains—alas, too few ! ”

Italy, as I have said already, or, to speak with perfect accuracy, Sicily, is the original home of the Sonnet. It, like so many more illustrious births, made its first appearance in that thirteenth century, so rich in glorious creations of almost every kind. To the latter half of that century the earliest examples of it which we possess belong. And as Italy was the birthplace of the Sonnet, so, probably, there are Italian Sonnets whose beauty has never been surpassed, if, indeed, it has been ever reached. At the same time, it must be owned that the Sonnet flourishes in Italy not merely as this "fair consummate flower," but also as a very common and very worthless weed. In the absence for nearly three centuries of all political, and, indeed, of all municipal life, the writing of bad verses (for bad the verses of nine hundred and ninety-nine in every thousand must be), was for Italians almost the only intellectual activity within their reach. No event was so trivial, none so commonplace, a tradesman could not open a larger shop, a government clerk could not obtain a few additional *scudi* of salary, but all his friends and acquaintance must celebrate the event, and clothe their congratulations in a copy of verses, which almost invariably assumed this shape. The wonderful power of scorn and depreciation which the Italian language possesses, as no less all which there must have been here to call out this contempt, is curiously attested in the fact, that, besides *Sonnetto*, the proper word for a Sonnet, the language has at least seven other words, derivatives from this, to express various shades of contempt, which weak, worthless, lame, impotent attempts in this kind called out.

Thus there is sonnettaccio, sonettino, sonnetterello, sonnettucciaccio; but I need not go through them all.

It would take up a great part of our little hour, and would not interest you at all, were I to enter in detail into all the rules which have been laid down by Italian critics for the right construction of the Sonnet. They are very complex, and very elaborate. I will briefly enumerate the chief conditions which, according to these rules of theirs, the ideal Sonnet should fulfil. In the first place, it must consist of fourteen lines, neither more nor less. These, again, must be distributed into two groups or systems; the major group or system consisting of the first eight lines, which should be complete in themselves; and then the minor group or system, of the six concluding lines. Again, the first eight lines should have only two rhymes between them; and these rhymes distributed in a fixed order and succession. You have the order on that blackboard behind me: the first, fourth, fifth, and eighth lines should all rhyme with one another. You will observe the strong framework, if I may so speak, which the arrangement of these rhymes in the octave or major system supplies. The second, third, sixth, and seventh, should in like manner have but one rhyme among them. There should be then a pause in the sense, and the six concluding lines, or minor system, should similarly contain only two rhymes; these in the most finished specimens of the Sonnet alternating with one another. All other things being equal, a Sonnet may be considered as nearest to perfection in its outward form which nearest approaches this model. Other rules have been laid down, some of them merely capricious, as, for example, that the

same word should never recur twice in the same Sonnet, with which I need not occupy your time. Those mentioned already may seem sufficiently troublesome, and hard to comply with.

When, however, the intending sonneteer complains of their strictness, of the heavy laws to which he must submit himself, to him it may be fairly replied, as an old Italian poet does reply to one whom he imagines making such complaint—"If this seem to thee a bed of Procrustes, who has compelled thee to lie on it? It is of thy own free choice that thou stretchest thyself thereon. Parnassus would not be in despair, the treasury of the Muses would not be bankrupt, even though thou shouldst withhold thy Sonnet from it." But, indeed, if these rules seem too hard, there is a very effectual protest against their stringency and extreme rigour; and that is, the not attending to them. And this protest nearly all composers of Sonnets, even the very best, have made; relaxing more or less the severity of these rules for themselves, allowing to themselves various licences and liberties. Indeed there is hardly a rule, except that which limits the Sonnet to fourteen lines, which has not been sometimes transgressed. Of course these licences and liberties may be so multiplied, so many of them may meet in a single poem, that, however it may retain the name, it will have forfeited altogether the character and distinctive marks of a Sonnet. The most frequent relaxation which poets have allowed themselves is this, namely—that while the strong outer framework of the major system remains unimpaired, the interior is filled in with lines which do no

all rhyme with one another, but only the second and third with each other, and again the sixth with the seventh; while in the six concluding lines, or minor system, instead of two rhymes only, three are admitted, and these disposed in almost any order that may prove the most convenient to the writer.

But what, it may be asked, are the inducements to the poet that he should, of his own free will, adjudge himself to such narrow limits and to such strict rules as these? What are the advantages which the Sonnet offers to compensate for the difficulties which it presents, for the restraints which it imposes? Why has the Sonnet been, with poets at least, I speak not now of their readers, so favourite a metre? They have, in the first place, felt, no doubt, the advantage of that check to diffuseness, that necessity of condensation and concentration which those narrow limits impose. Oftentimes a poem which, except for these, would have been but a loose nebulous vapour, has been compressed and rounded into a star. Then, too, while it is quite true that ampler space and larger room are needful for a full display of power, that the Sonnet has not the capabilities of the epic poem, nor even of the ode, this, while it limits the glory which may be acquired in this province of verse, also limits the hazards of him who adventures himself therein. All which can be fairly demanded of any poem is, that, within the limits which its own law assigns it, it shall accomplish that which it has undertaken, and which within those limits is feasible. We do not complain of the cameo that it is not a statue large as the life, nor yet of the small mountain tarn that it

is not the ocean with all its illimitable waves. Each has a proper beauty of its own. The Sonnet, like a Grecian temple, may be limited in its scope, but like that, if successful, it is altogether perfect.

But it is with the history of the English Sonnet that we have this day mainly to do; and on this, without further preface, and overpassing much, I must enter. Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, beheaded in 1546, being the last of the judicial murders perpetrated by Henry VIII, was the first to give the Sonnet a home in the literature of England. Few poets, as Southey has truly observed, who have written so little have produced so great an effect on the literature of this country. He occupies, indeed, in English literature, very much the position which Garcilasso occupies in that of Spain. To him we owe not merely the introduction of this graceful measure, but (far more important) he was the first who wrote blank verse in English, and showed the eminent adaptation of this metre to the genius of the language. His Sonnets have real merit; but my time will not allow me to quote any one of them.

We come now to a name shining very brightly, though not unobscured with mists, in our English firmament of fame. The "*Astrophel and Stella*"—star-lover, that is, and star—of Sir Philip Sidney is mostly made up of Sonnets, and these addressed to one, who, if the course of true love had run smooth, should have been his wife; but when, through the misunderstanding of parents, or through some other cause, she had become the wife of another man, they would better have been left



unwritten. They are what Milton has called his prose romance of *The Arcadia*, "vain and amatorious;" in nothing, indeed, unbecoming, except in that one fact which I have mentioned already, but thus wanting in that foundation of moral dignity for which nothing else is a substitute. Grace, fancy, passion which makes itself felt through the artificial forms of a Platonic philosophy, they possess. They abound, too, with single lines, or complete quatrains, of a rare beauty. Thus one begins thus—

" Oh tears ! no tears, but rain from beauty's eyes ; "

and another—

" With how sad steps, O Moon, thou climbst the sky, '  
How silently, and with how wan a face."

And this is the harmonious opening quatrain of another—

" Come, sleep, O sleep, the certain knot of peace,  
The baiting place of wit, the balm of woe,  
The poor man's wealth, the prisoner's release,  
The indifferent judge between the high and low."

Spenser's Sonnets are for the most part the story of his patient wooing and happy winning of the lady of his love—" Amoretti," as he himself has named them—very tender and graceful; but, it must be confessed, a little tedious, extending as they do to nearly one hundred; and wanting that full body of thought which must always make Shakespeare's so inexhaustible a study. That they deserve the praise which I give them

you will, I am persuaded, own with me, when I shall have read one of them to you. I believe it is the only Sonnet, "vain and amatorious," for which I shall crave a hearing. Such other as I may have occasion to quote will be set to other keys:—

"Like as a huntsman, after weary chase,  
Seeing the game from him escaped away,  
Sits down to rest him in some shady place,  
With panting hounds beguiled of their prey;  
So, after long pursuit and vain assay,  
When I all weary had the chase forsook,  
The gentle deer returned the selfsame way,  
Thinking to quench her thirst at the next brook.  
There she, beholding me with milder look,  
Sought not to fly, but fearless still did bide,  
Till I in hand her yet half trembling took,  
And with her own good-will her firmly tied.  
Strange thing, me seemed, to see a beast so wild  
So goodly won, with her own will beguiled."

Interspersed with these are a few Sonnets on sacred things—interspersed, but not jarring with them; for Spenser's verse is still pure, whether the object of it is earthly or heavenly. Here is one on the Resurrection, not perhaps first-rate, but good:—

"Most glorious Lord of Life! that on this day  
Didst make thy triumph over death and sin;  
And having harrowed hell, didst bring away  
Captivity thence captive, us to win:  
This joyous day, dear Lord, with joy begin,  
And grant that we, for whom Thou diddest die,  
Being with thy dear blood clean washed from sin,  
May live for ever in felicity!  
And that thy love we weighing worthily,  
May likewise love Thee for the same again;

And for thy sake, that all like dear did buy,  
With love may one another entertain.  
So let us love, dear Love, like as we ought:  
Love is the lesson which the Lord us taught."

I cannot enter here into the mystery of Shakespeare's Sonnets—to whom they were addressed—whether all to one person, or whether they should be divided into two groups, or even more—how far they may be regarded as authentic pieces of his own biography; or whether any such notion is to be dismissed altogether, as merely leading us astray. It is a mystery which has never yet been solved. Only a few days ago a volume of some hundred pages was published on this very subject; but I do not think it a whit nearer its solution than before. Leaving all this aside, I will cite one or two of these without attempting to fit them into any place in his life. There is, indeed, a certain difficulty in quoting Shakespeare's Sonnets on an occasion like the present—a difficulty which their peculiar merit occasions. It is plain in such lectures as these that what we offer for your admiration we can yet read in your hearing but once. Now the best of Shakespeare's Sonnets are so heavily laden with meaning, so double-shotted, if one may so say, with thought, so penetrated and pervaded with a repressed passion, that, packed as is all this into closest limits, it sometimes imparts no little obscurity to them; and they require to be heard or read not once but many times, in fact, to be studied, before the connection of the parts is perfectly clear, and they reveal to us all the vast treasure of thought and feeling which they contain. What a wonderful poem, for

example, is the following, the subject of it being the folly of making such ample provision for that body which we must presently lay down in the dust, suffering meanwhile the soul, which is our proper self, to pine and to starve :—

“ Poor soul ! the centre of my sinful earth,  
 Fooled by these rebel powers that thee array,  
 Why dost thou pine within and suffer dearth,  
 Painting thy outward walls so costly gay ?  
 Why so large cost, having so short a lease,  
 Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend ?  
 Shall worms, inheritors of this excess,  
 Eat up thy charge ?—is this thy body's end ?  
 Then, soul, live thou upon thy servant's loss,  
 And let that pine to aggravate thy store ;  
 Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross ;  
 Within be fed, without be rich no more :  
 So shalt thou feed on Death, that feeds on men,  
 And Death once dead, there's no more dying then.”

Again, what a wonderful poem is the following. It may seem obscure at a first, obscure, it may be, at a second and third reading ; but if you will study it at home and master it (it is his 129th), I can promise you that there are very few sermons indeed from which you will have learned lessons so solemn and so profound. Its subject, the bitter delusion of all sinful pleasures, the reaction of a swift remorse which inevitably dogs them, is one on which Shakespeare must have felt most deeply, as he has expressed himself upon it most profoundly. I know no picture of this kind at all so terrible in its truth as in his “ Rape of Lucrece ” the picture of Tarquin, after he had successfully wrought his

deed of shame. But this is not for us here. The Sonnet on the same argument is as follows:—

“ The expense of spirit in a waste of shame  
Is lust in action ; and till action, lust  
Is perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame,  
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust ;  
Enjoyed no sooner, but despised straight ;  
Past reason hunted ; and no sooner had,  
Past reason hated ; as a swallowed bait,  
On purpose laid to make the taker mad.  
Mad in pursuit, and in possession so ;  
Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme ;  
A bliss in proof—and proved, a very woe ;  
Before, a joy proposed ; behind, a dream ;  
All this the world well knows ; yet none knows well  
To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.”

It has been sometimes debated how far Shakespeare knew himself for all that he was, was aware of the unique place which he should occupy in the hearts of his people, the throne unapproachable by any rival or competitor, which succeeding ages should assign him. It is scarcely reconcileable with that modesty which was so eminently his, that he should have anticipated this to the full, the “ever wider avenues of fame” which should open before him. But that he should live, an “heir of memory” himself, a conferrer of fame upon others, one in whose verse to be embalmed was in some sort to live for ever,—I ask no further evidence of his consciousness of this than the following Sonnet supplies:—

“ Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day ?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate :

Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
 And summer's lease hath all too short a date :  
 Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
 And often is his gold complexion dimm'd ;  
 And every fair from fair sometimes declines,  
 By chance, or nature's changing course untrimm'd :  
 But thy eternal summer shall not fade,  
 Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest ;  
 Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,  
 When in eternal lines to time thou growest ;—  
 So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,  
 So long lives this, and this gives life to thee ! ”

The poet from whom I shall next cite is one who, in the unfolding of his moral and spiritual life, has often reminded me of St. Augustine. I do not of course mean that, noteworthy as on more than one account he was, he even remotely approaches in intellectual or spiritual stature the chief Doctor and Father of the Latin Church. Still there was in Donne the same tumultuous youth ; the same entanglement in youthful lusts ; the same conflict with, and the same final deliverance from these ; and then the same passionate and personal grasp of the central truths of Christianity, linking itself, as this did, with all that he had suffered and all that he had sinned, and all through which, by God's grace, he had victoriously struggled. It is a rough, rugged piece of verse which I am about to quote (all Donne's poetry is imperfect in form and workmanship) ; but I am confident you will own with me that he who wrote it was not playing with verses ; but that it is the genuine cry of one engaged in that mightiest of all struggles, wherein, as we are winners or losers, we have won all, or lost all :—

“As due by many titles, I resign  
Myself to Thee, O God. First I was made  
By Thee and for Thee; and, when I was decayed,  
Thy blood bought that, the which before was thine.  
I am thy son, made with Thyself to shine,  
Thy servant, whose pains Thou hast still repaid,  
Thy sheep, thine image, and, till I betrayed  
Myself, a temple of thy spirit divine.  
Why doth the devil then usurp on me?  
Why doth he steal, nay, ravish that's thy right?  
Except Thou rise, and for thine own work fight,  
Oh! I shall soon despair, when I shall see  
That Thou lov'st mankind well, yet wilt not choose me,  
And Satan hates me, yet is loth to lose me.”

William Drummond, of Hawthornden, the friend of Ben Jonson, and the first Scottish poet who wrote well in English, has left a considerable number of Sonnets, many among them of singular beauty and finish in their execution. From his “*Flowers of Sion*” I select the following. He has entitled it “*Human Frailty*.”

“A good that never satisfies the mind,  
A beauty fading like the April showers,  
A sweet with floods of gall that runs combined,  
A pleasure passing ere in thought made ours;  
An honour that more fickle is than wind,  
A glory at opinion's frown that low'rs,  
A treasury that bankrupt time devours,  
A knowledge than grave ignorance more blind;  
A vain delight our equals to command,  
A style of greatness, in effect a dream;  
A swelling thought of holding sea and land,  
A servile lot, deck'd with a pompous name;—  
Are the strange ends we toil for here below,  
Till wisest death makes us our errors know.”

Milton's Sonnets, excluding those which he wrote in Italian, are only seventeen in all :—

“Soul-animating strains, alas! too few.”

They were all composed in the long interval which found place between the two periods of his poetical activity, and are abundantly interesting as the only poems which belong to that time. These two periods of poetical activity which I speak of are divided from one another, as is well known, by a space of some twenty years, the whole duration of our great Civil War and of the Commonwealth which followed. To the first period belong “Comus,” and “Lycidas,” and indeed all his exquisite lyrics, the “linked sweetness” of which is sufficient to refute Dryden’s suggestion that he wrote “Paradise Lost” in blank verse from his inability to write it in rhyme. To the second period belongs the austerer grandeur of the “Paradise Lost” and the “Regained,” and of “Samson Agonistes.” The Sonnets alone give evidence that his poetical animation was not altogether suspended during the time which intervened. They are certainly the noblest in the English language. It is curious to observe the utter incapacity under which Johnson labours of recognizing this surpassing greatness of theirs. The utmost which he will allow is that “three of them are not bad;” and, as Boswell reports, he and Hannah More once set themselves to investigate the reason of their badness, the badness itself being taken for granted. Johnson’s explanation of this is so witty, contains so lively an illustration, that it is worth quoting, even while the appropriateness of it to the matter in



hand must be wholly denied. "Why, Madam," he said, "Milton's was a genius that could hew a colossus out of a rock, but could not carve heads on cherry-stones."

These "heads carved on cherry-stones" are now so familiar to us, that I am almost reluctant to produce any of them here. And yet perhaps I should say they *ought to be* so familiar to us. At least, I know of a young lady, who, having toiled through and at length reached the concluding page of "Paradise Lost," cast the book with weariness aside, at the same time exclaiming, "Well, that is done, and for life." The Sonnets may have met the same treatment or worse; and to some here they may possibly be new; while those to whom they are the most familiar will probably be the best pleased to hear one or two of them again. Here is one, and I will not omit the full heading to it which Milton himself has given:—

ON THE RELIGIOUS MEMORY OF  
MRS. CATHERINE THOMSON,  
MY CHRISTIAN FRIEND, DECEASED  
16TH DECEMBER, 1646.

"When faith and love, which parted from thee never,  
Had ripened thy just soul to dwell with God,  
Meekly thou didst resign this earthly load  
Of death, called life, which us from life doth sever.  
Thy works, and alms, and all thy good endeavour  
Stayed not behind, nor in the grave were trod;  
But as Faith pointed with her golden rod  
Followed thee up to joy and bliss for ever.

Love led them on, and Faith, who knew them best,  
 Thy handmaids, clad them o'er with purple beams  
 And azure wings, that up they flew so drest,  
 And spake the truth of thee on glorious themes  
 Before the Judge, who thenceforth bid thee rest,  
 And drink thy fill of pure immortal streams."

Another shows us him communing with his own heart, and learning to be still:—

#### ON HIS BLINDNESS.

"When I consider how my light is spent  
 Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,  
 And that one talent which is death to hide  
 Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent  
 To serve therewith my Maker, and present  
 My true account, lest He returning chide;  
 Doth God exact day labour, light denied?  
 I fondly ask;—but Patience, to prevent  
 That murmur, soon replies: God doth not need  
 Either man's work or his own gifts; who best  
 Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best; his state  
 Is kingly; thousands at his bidding speed,  
 And post o'er land and ocean without rest;  
 They also serve who only stand and wait."

The influence of Italian literature upon English may be said to have lasted to the Restoration; and in some whose characters were already formed, who had completed their poetical education before our civil troubles began, in Milton, for example, considerably beyond it. But with him the Italian period closes, and with Dryden, his immediate successor on the throne of English poetry, the period of French influences begins. With Milton, as naturally follows, the first great company of Sonnet-writers closes; and the Sonnet, which,

as we have seen, was a flower which had sprung up on Italian soil, and had from that been transplanted to our own, flourishes no more, that is, for at least a century to come. There is not a single poem thrown into this form in Dryden, nor yet in Pope. You would look for it equally in vain among all those writers who formed themselves on the model of these. With Gray, Warton, and Mason it first emerges again.

As, however, in my rapid progress through that province of Poet's land, in which I have offered myself as your guide to-day, I linger nowhere at spots of secondary importance (since only so can I hope not to exhaust your patience, or wear out your interest), I must pass all these, with not a few others, by. In other regions of poetical art they may have done well—even excellently well; but in this only tolerably, and a tolerable Sonnet is the most intolerable thing of all. There is one name, however, which I cannot pass by, and that is Cowper's. Neither passion nor imagination, the two chief constituent elements of the poet, were vouchsafed to him in any very large measure; and yet English Poetry owes to Cowper an incalculable debt for whatever of sound and healthy and true it has produced during the last hundred years; but without discussing further his general merits as a poet, I will read to you a composition, of which an excellent critic of our own day has written thus:—

“ I know no Sonnet more remarkable than this, which records Cowper's gratitude to the lady whose affectionate care for many years gave what sweetness he could enjoy to a life radically wretched. Petrarch's Sonnets have a more ethereal grace, and a more perfect

finish ; Shakespeare's more passion ; Milton's stand supreme in stateliness ; Wordsworth's in depth and delicacy ;—but Cowper's unites with an exquisiteness in the turn of thought, which the ancients would have called irony, an intensity of pathetic tenderness peculiar to his long and ingenuous nature." After such praise as this, it would only be too easy for the poem to fall below your high-raised expectation, but I do not think this will be the case :—

" Mary ! I want a lyre with other strings,  
Such aid from heaven as some have feigned they drew,  
An eloquence scarce given to mortals, new  
And undebased by praise of meaner things ;  
That ere, through age or woe, I shed my wings,  
I may record thy worth with honour due,  
In verse as musical as thou art true,  
And that immortalizes whom it sings.  
But thou hast little need. There is a book  
Of seraphs writ with beams of heavenly light,  
On which the eyes of God not rarely look ;  
A chronicle of actions just and bright :  
There all thy deeds, my faithful Mary, shine—  
And since thou own'st that praise, I spare thee mine."

Declining to linger with Hayley, or Bowles, or Anna Seward, or Charlotte Smith, we pass at once from Cowper to Wordsworth. Wordsworth is by far the most skilful master in this kind of poetry among that illustrious company of poets who, contemporary with the French Revolution, owed very much of their inspiration to the mighty passions for good and for evil which that great catastrophe aroused. On him I must needs dwell a little. His Sonnets are so numerous, and many among

them so admirable, as to constitute a large and substantial part of that poetical wealth with which he has enriched the literature of England. He turned the Sonnet to a new use, found a new capability in it. Many before him, as Sidney, and Spenser, and Shakespeare, had dedicated a vast number of Sonnets to the same person, to the lady of their love, real or ideal, or to some other person, as might happen. Still this, that they were all addressed to the same person, and pervaded with the same spirit, was the only bond of connection between them. There was not properly any progress from one to another, but each stood alone and independent. Wordsworth, as far as I know, was the first who conceived a poem made up of a succession of Sonnets, each complete in itself, but each at the same time constituting, so to speak, a stanza of that larger poem whereof it formed a part; just as in a bracelet made up of a string of cameos, or mosaics, each may be a perfect little picture in itself, while at the same time contributing to the beauty and perfection of a larger whole. Such are his "Ecclesiastical Sonnets," the story of the Church of England; such, though not quite so closely linked together, those on the river Duddon, a beautiful stream in the lake district, by the banks of which he loved to wander. But far worthier of our admiration, a far more precious heritage to England than either of these series, are his Sonnets, some seventy or eighty in all, dedicated to Liberty. Well do they deserve this name. They are the birth, for the most part, of the darkest hours of that tremendous conflict with revolutionary and imperial France which our

fathers brought at length to so triumphant a close. In those darkest hours, when England stood alone, the one untaken citadel of the world's freedom, when all the other nations of Europe, after brief and ill-managed conflicts with France, had yielded themselves her vassals, when, worse than this, so many of England's own sons were counselling ignoble compromise, or shameful submission, and that we should no longer maintain a hopeless struggle, for so they called it, with an overmastering foe, there was no weakness, no faltering, no despondency in him. Others, yes, and some brave by nature, might be tainting the air with their words of apprehension and of despair; but loud and clear through the darkness and the gloom rung the trumpet tones of Wordsworth's voice, prophesying doom to the oppressor, deliverance to the oppressed, and breathing into other hearts the same confidence and courage which never departed from his own. What a noble record of the temper of England's noblest sons in that agony of England's fate we possess in these "Sonnets to Liberty" of which I speak; for in his hands, also, as in Milton's before him, "the thing became a trumpet." This, which I am about to read to you, one of its trumpet notes, was written at the close of 1806, immediately after the fatal battle of Jena, in which the power of Prussia, our sole remaining ally on the Continent, had been utterly shattered, as that of Austria had been in the year preceding on the field of Austerlitz:—

"Another year!—another deadly blow!  
 Another mighty empire overthrown!  
 And we are left, or shall be left, alone;  
 The last that dare to struggle with the foe.

'Tis well ; from this day forward we shall know  
That in ourselves our safety must be sought ;  
That by our own right hands it must be wrought.  
That we must stand unpropped, or be laid low.  
O dastard, whom such foretaste doth not cheer !  
We shall exult, if they who rule the land  
Be men who hold its many blessings dear,  
Wise, upright, valiant ; not a servile band,  
Who are to judge of danger which they fear,  
And honour which they do not understand."

But Wordsworth was too profound a moral thinker not to know very well that when great nations perish, it is not by external violence, but by internal corruption ; this, sapping and undermining all the springs of their true strength, alone makes possible that outward catastrophe which is but the visible consummation of an invisible dissolution and decay that has long before been going forward. And thus, if at any time he feared for England, it was not because of Milan decrees which threatened to strangle her commerce, not because of armies of invasion which hoped to occupy her soil, but because of the selfishness, the luxury, the mammon-worship, the ignoble reverence for things unworthy of reverence ; in all of which, champion though she was of the world's freedom, she allowed herself so far ; and many of the grandest of these Sonnets dedicated to Liberty are warning words to her that her true danger was here ; that the truth, and the truth only, would make or would keep her free. Thus, take this that follows :—

"Milton ! thou shouldst be living at this hour.  
England hath need of thee ; she is a fen  
Of stagnant waters ; altar, sword, and pen,  
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,

Have forfeited their ancient English dower  
Of inward happiness : we are selfish men :  
Oh raise us up, return to us again ;  
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.  
Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart :  
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea ;  
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free ;  
So didst thou travel on life's common way  
In cheerful godliness ; and yet thy heart  
The lowliest duties on herself did lay."

I will ask you to listen to one or two other of Wordsworth's more miscellaneous Sonnets, and then very reluctantly I shall leave him. This is one :—

" It is a beauteous evening, calm and free ;  
The holy time is quiet as a nun  
Breathless with adoration ; the broad sun  
Is sinking down in its tranquillity ;  
The gentleness of heaven is on the sea ;  
Listen ! the mighty Being is awake,  
And doth with his eternal motion make  
A sound like thunder everlastingly.  
Dear child ! dear girl ! that walkest with me here,  
If thou appear untouched by solemn thought,  
Thy nature is not therefore less divine,  
Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year,  
And worship'st at the Temple's inner shrine,  
God being with thee when we know it not."

Here is another—on the extinction of the Venetian Republic :—

" Once she did hold the gorgeous East in fee,  
And was the safeguard of the West ; the worth  
Of Venice did not fall below her birth,  
Venice, the eldest child of liberty.  
She was a maiden city, bright and free ;  
No guile seduced, no force could violate ;  
And when she took unto herself a mate,  
She must espouse the everlasting sea.



And what if she had seen those glories fade,  
 Those titles vanish, and that strength decay,  
 Yet shall some tribute of regret be paid  
 When her long life hath reached its final day :  
 Men are we, and must grieve when even the shade  
 Of that which once was great has passed away."

While Wordsworth must thus be regarded as the central figure among the modern artificers of this kind of verse, the skilfullest to mould his material into perfect and satisfying forms of beauty, he is very far from being the only one. We have Sonnets, but neither numerous nor eminently good, from his own immediate contemporaries, Byron, and Southey, and Shelley, and Coleridge. Byron's on Chillon, beginning—

"Eternal spirit of the chainless mind,"

is good, yet scarcely good enough to quote. Coleridge's, in like manner, which belong for the most part to the revolutionary and Unitarian period of his life, are few ; and if they were fewer still, earnest admirers of his poetry, from the number of whom I should be very sorry to be excluded, would have little or nothing to regret. There is one, on reading Schiller's "Robbers"—

"Schiller, that hour I could have wished to die,"

which has merit, but belongs too much to what the Germans have so wittily styled the Storm and Stress school of poetry, and another, called "Fancy in Nubibus," is a fine composition, which, however, I can do no more than indicate to-day.

Keats has not left us many Sonnets ; but there is one which, familiar as it must be to many here, I yet will not deprive the three or four in this assembly who

may have never heard it of the pleasure of hearing. I must premise, for the sake of its full understanding, that Keats, who was of comparatively humble birth, had not enjoyed a classical education. His Latin probably was little, and his Greek none at all ; and thus Homer in the original had been to him a sealed book ; and when he turned to Pope's translation, he found, no doubt, a fine poem of its kind, but nothing which corresponded in the least to his previous expectations of what Homer ought to be. It was only when Chapman's earlier translation, rough and rugged, with a thousand imperfections, but full of life and vigour and power, fell into his hands, that he caught a glimpse of Homer as he truly was ; and this his experience he has grandly recorded in the poem I shall read to you now :—

“ Much have I travelled in the realms of gold,  
 And many goodly states and kingdoms seen ;  
 Round many western islands have I been,  
 Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.  
 Oft of one wide expanse had I been told,  
 That deep-browed Homer ruled as his demesne ;  
 Yet did I never breathe its pure serene,  
 Till I heard Chapman speak out, loud and bold.  
 Then felt I like some watcher of the skies,  
 When a new planet swims into his ken ;  
 Or like stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes  
 He stared at the Pacific ; and his men  
 Looked at each other with a wild surmise—  
 Silent, upon a peak of Darien.”

But I must quote another of Keats's Sonnets—one not so well known as that other, but recording, like it, the impressions which a great poem of an elder poet made upon the young poet's mind. I cannot, of course,

expect that in a large audience like the present more than a few should be acquainted with Chaucer's "Flower and Leaf;" nor can I pause to characterize this poem further than to say that it has all that fresh vernal grace and fancy which you might expect from a poem with such a name and by such a poet. Keats's Sonnet is headed "On reading 'The Flower and the Leaf.'" It is more of an impromptu than that other, and wants something of its finished stateliness; but Chaucer himself would have read it with delight; above all, the exquisite allusion to the Babes in the Wood with which it concludes:—

"This pleasant tale is like a little copse,  
 The honied lines so freshly interlace  
 To keep the reader in so sweet a place,  
 So that he here and there full-hearted stops;  
 And oftentimes he feels the dewy drops  
 Come cool and suddenly against his face,  
 And by the wand'ring melody may trace  
 Which way the tender-legged linnet hops.  
 O, what a charm hath white simplicity!  
 What mighty power hath this gentle story!  
 I that for ever feel athirst for glory,  
 Could at this moment be content to lie  
 Meekly upon the grass, as those whose sobbings  
 Were heard of none beside the mournful robins."

Those who are familiar with the earlier numbers of the *Edinburgh Review* may perhaps remember the review of an unlucky volume of poems, "The Doge's Daughter," written by the Lord Thurlow of that day; I need hardly say, not the Lord Thurlow of the law. The Reviewers were not abusing—as it must be owned they too often at that time were—their critical rights,

when they made sport of the wretched doggrel of which this volume was mainly composed. And yet, strangely enough, amid this wilderness of nonsense, there stands out a Sonnet of stately and thoughtful beauty—one which no anthology of English Sonnets ought henceforward ever to omit. As it is pleasant to gather out a jewel from a heap of pebbles with which it was in danger of being confounded, and among which lost, I will read this to you. It is addressed to a water-bird, haunting a stream or lake during the winter:—

“ O melancholy bird !—a winter’s day  
 Thou standest by the margin of the pool,  
 And, taught by God, dost thy whole being school  
 To patience, which all evil can allay :  
 God has appointed thee the fish thy prey ;  
 And given thyself a lesson to the fool  
 Unthrifty, to submit to moral rule,  
 And his unthinking course by thee to weigh.  
 There need not schools, nor the professor’s chair,  
 (Though these be good), true wisdom to impart,  
 He, who has not enough for these to spare  
 Of time or gold, may yet amend his heart,  
 And teach his soul by brooks and rivers fair :  
 Nature is always wise in every part.”

I said just now of Coleridge—that is, the Coleridge of mightiest name,—that he has left us very little of memorable in this form. With his son Hartley it is otherwise. The mournful story of Hartley Coleridge’s life—the story of one who, possessing so many rarest gifts, yet wanted the gift which would alone have given value to all the others, the gift, that is, of ordering his own life wisely and well—has been told with exquisite delicacy and feeling, and, difficult as this was, with no

less sincerity and truthfulness, by his own brother, in a memoir prefixed to a collected edition of his poems, published after his death. I draw from these volumes a Sonnet which tells of the sad self-reproach for a wasted life which haunted him, of the hope of better things which never quite forsook him. It is, I believe, an eminently truthful piece of autobiography, the self-reproach true, and no less true the timid hope as well :—

“ Too true it is, my time of power was spent  
 In idly watering weeds of casual growth,  
 That wasted energy to desperate sloth  
 Declined, and fond self-seeking discontent ;  
 That the huge debt for all that nature lent  
 I sought to cancel, and was nothing loth  
 To deem myself an outlaw, severed both  
 From duty and from hope—yea, blindly sent  
 Without an errand, where I would to stray :  
 Too true it is, that, knowing now my state,  
 I weakly mourn the sin I ought to hate,  
 Nor love the law I yet would fain obey ;  
 But true it is, above all law and fate,  
 Is faith, abiding the appointed day.”

The following is in a lighter mood, and singularly graceful, as all must allow. It is headed “To a lofty Beauty, from her poor Kinsman :”—

“ Fair maid, had I not heard thy baby cries,  
 Nor seen thy girlish, sweet vicissitude,  
 Thy mazy motions, striving to elude,  
 Yet wooing still a parent’s watchful eyes.  
 Thy humours, many as the opal’s dyes,  
 And lovely all ;—methinks thy scornful mood  
 And bearing high of stately womanhood—  
 Thy brow, where beauty sits to tyrannise  
 O’er humble love, had made me sadly fear thee ;  
 For never, sure, was seen a royal bride

Whose gentleness gave grace to so much pride.  
 My very thoughts would tremble to be near thee ;  
 But when I see thee at thy father's side,  
 Old times unqueen thee, and old loves endear thee."

Alfred Tennyson never seems to have cared much for the Sonnet ; at least, he has very rarely clothed his own thoughts in this form. One Sonnet of his, of moderate merit, I can remember ; another, found in the earlier editions of his "*Lyrical Poems*," has dropt out of the later. But although he has given us little in this kind, there was a tiny volume of Sonnets published by his brother Charles, between thirty and forty years ago, which shows plainly that, however the poetical gift may have come to its head in Alfred, he is not the only poet of the family. In this volume—it was published I think when he was still at College—there are some Sonnets of rare and excellent workmanship. This is one,—a flock of pigeons the argument :—

" A hundred wings are dropt as soft as one ;  
 Now ye are lighted—lovely to my sight  
 The fearful circle of your gentle flight,  
 Rapid and mute, and drawing homeward soon :  
 And then the sober chiding of your tone,  
 As there ye sit from your own roofs arraigning  
 My trespass on your haunts, so boldly done,  
 Sounds like a solemn and a just complaining !  
 O happy, happy race ! for though there clings  
 A feeble fear about your timid clan,  
 Yet are ye blest ! with not a thought that brings  
 Disquietude, while proud and sorrowing man,  
 An eagle weary of his mighty wings,  
 With anxious inquest fills his little span."

Let me invite your attention to the grandeur of the concluding lines :—

“proud and sorrowing man,  
An eagle weary of his mighty wings,  
With anxious inquest fills his little span.”

Who that has once heard these lines is likely soon to forget them?

Lord Houghton—as a poet he is better known as Monckton Milnes—has written several fine Sonnets. Many here are no doubt familiar with Turner’s picture (it is itself a poem), of the *Téméraire*, a grand old man-of-war (it had been, as its name indicates, taken from the French), towed into port by a little ugly steamer, that so after all its noble toils it might there be broken up. This fine picture is finely interpreted in the following Sonnet:—

“ See how the small concentrate fiery force  
Is grappling with the glory of the main,  
That follows like some grave heroic corse,  
Dragged by a sutler from the heap of slain.  
Thy solemn presence brings us more than pain —  
Something which Fancy moulds into remorse,  
That we, who of thine honour held the gain,  
Should from its dignity thy form divorce.  
Yet will we read in thy high vaunting name,  
How Britain *did* what France could only *dare*,  
And, while the sunset gilds the darkening air,  
We will fill up thy shadowy lines with fame;  
And, tomb or temple, hail thee still the same,  
Home of great thoughts, memorial *Téméraire*!”

Poor Blanco White! Probably few of us in this city, where for some years he dwelt, are unacquainted with the main outlines of his mental and moral history. No sadder nor more pathetic story, none that more wrings the heart, has ever been written than that which his life records; how he passed from one form of

Christian faith to another, how from that again to a third, and then passed out of all forms of belief into the dim darkness and uncertainty beyond. That, however, is a theme neither for this place nor time. It is not a little remarkable that he, to whom English was an acquired language, who can have had little or no experience in the mechanism of English verse, should yet have left us what Coleridge does not scruple to call "the finest and most grandly conceived Sonnet in our language." Coleridge, it is true, slightly modifies these words by adding, "at least, it is only in Milton and in Wordsworth that I remember any rival." The grand thought of it, as you will perceive, is this. Night, which at first threatens to hide all things from view, in fact reveals to us those illimitable starry worlds of which, and of the existence of which, except for it, we should not have had the slightest suspicion. What if death, which in like manner threatens to hide so much, shall indeed reveal far more than it hides?

"Mysterious night! when our first parent knew  
Thee from report divine, and heard thy name,  
Did he not tremble for this lovely frame,  
This glorious canopy of light and blue?  
Yet 'neath a curtain of translucent dew,  
Bathed in the rays the great setting flame,  
Hesperus with the host of heaven came,  
And lo! Creation widened in man's view.  
Who could have thought such darkness lay concealed,  
Within thy beams, O Sun! or who could find,  
Whilst fly, and leaf, and insect stood revealed,  
That to such countless orbs thou mad'st us blind?  
Why do we then shun death with anxious strife?  
If Light can thus deceive, wherefore not Life?"

I have now brought my subject, which, somewhat



presumptuously, I have styled the History of the English Sonnet, to a close, or, at any rate, I have more than exhausted the time during which I have a right to claim your attention. There is one advantage which a lecture on such a theme, and managed as I have ventured to manage mine, can hardly fail to possess. It is this—that even if the lecturer's own words are nought, or next to nought, have little value or none, still, if only he have skill enough to choose his specimens and examples well, he can hardly fail more or less to instruct and elevate his hearers, to bring before them something of high thought clothed in harmonious shapes, which either they have not heard before, or having heard, are willing to hear again. Let me trust that so it has this day been. Much is ever seeking to draw us downward, to ruffle the plumes of the soul, to clog them with the dust and defilements of earth. But next to those highest and most solemn influences, on which here is no place to dwell, next, although at an immeasurable distance, as enabling us to rise above “the smoke and stir of this dim spot,” are the lofty thoughts of high and lofty-minded men, which they have clothed for all after-time in permanent shapes of grace, and harmony, and strength. I am persuaded, after what you have heard, you will own with me, that of their loftiest, purest, tenderest, best, they have not thought it scorn to embody some portion in the form of the Sonnet; that it too has honour of its own—honour in which all who count that England's poetry is one of her richest inheritances may justly rejoice.



HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF  
STORY-TELLING.

BY PROFESSOR D'ARCY THOMPSON.







## HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF STORY-TELLING.

**A**MUSEMENT is as requisite for the brain as pleasant exercise for the body, or as light for the support of animal and vegetable life, or as vegetables and fruit for the maintenance of human health.

Pleasure may be conveyed to the brain by anticipation, the spendthrift of the future ; by memory, the miser of the past ; or by one or all of the five senses, whose operations are conversant only with time present. It may be conveyed in a very restricted way through the two senses of touch and smell ; in a powerful, but prosaic, way through the organs of taste ; in a splendid and scenic way through the eye ; and in a manner fleeting, evanescent, but divine, through the ear.

A blind man may derive from the sense of touch a pleasure beyond all our conceptions. With us, the sense has no part in the business of mental enjoyment.

I know of nothing beyond snuff for furnishing a mental stimulant through the nose.

The substantial part of a good dinner may render a man lazily and sentimentally philanthropic during the period of digestion ; but only the liquid part, and that when taken in perfection as to quality, and, in regard to quantity, a trifle beyond moderation, can heighten his intellectual sensibilities, or expand his intellectual capacity.

Music appeals to the brain with a singular rapidity, subtlety, and directness. If it be grand, solemn, and majestic, it will remain there in an apparent quiescence, while in reality it will be stirring therein swift and sweet, but shuddering, reflections concerning freedom and life and death and immortality and God and all things infinite and past understanding. If music be light and merry, it will pervade and penetrate us with a sunlight that may be felt ; it will run along the nerve-conductors, surcharge us with electricity, and set our hands and feet in involuntary motion. It will, for the time, keep the beatings of our hearts in unison and harmony and sympathy with the ripples of waters, the natural melodies of bird-musicians ; the rustling of winds through green leaves, the flutterings and timidities and coynesses of girlhood, and the ringing laughter of happy, romping children. Music conveys the most ravishing and exquisite and pure of all mental pleasures. Its travelling notes are finer than gossamers, impalpable as sunbeams ; but alas ! the pleasure it conveys is as ephemeral as it is exquisite. We cannot frame a melody, to hang it on our walls ; we cannot set it on a pedestal, or bind it in Russia leather. It is a free spirit and a volatile, and

will away ; to attempt retaining it a prisoner were as vain as the attempt to clutch a perfume in the hand or nail a rainbow to the wall.

The eye is the chief and commonest inlet of instruction and delight ; and the delight which it occasions may be subdivided into pleasure caused by obvious realities, and pleasure distilled from symbols by that chemical wizard, Imagination ; and this wizard may be evoked by scenic representation, picture, sculpture, or story. And story-telling may, in some sense, embrace all the other methods ; and to story-telling, or story-reading, our attention is now chiefly directed.

If ancient mythologies were thoroughly probed, they would, for the most part, resolve themselves into a simple, beautiful, and far from debasing adoration of the great powers of Nature ; and the sun, the moon, the stars, earth, sea, fire, and air, would be found leading or elementary characters. The real or apparent movements of the two great lights, their partial or total eclipses, their risings and their settings, their real or supposed effects upon animal and vegetable life ; the periodic, but unaccountable, appearance and disappearance of particular stars ; the rare visitation of a comet, the appalling splendour of a meteor ; the variation produced by the seasons on the earth's surface ; the antagonistic influences of fire and water ; the bursting of the volcano ; the fall of rain, and hail, and snow ; the downward tumbling of the mountain torrent ; the crash and the long reverberation of the thunder ; the quick and angry leap of the blue and jagged lightning ; the ebb and flow of the sea-tides ; the sudden rise or fall of

river-waters; the sweet mystery of the echo; the cloud settling on the mountain-top; the arrest by winter of the running stream; the whistling of the winds through mountain forests; the sun-painted flower; that vivified flower, the butterfly; the rainbow in the sky, and all the diversities of atmospheric phenomena, would at first be expressed, from the happy poverty of early vocabularies, in metaphorical or allegorical terms.

Now, language is the exponent, more or less perfect, of thought; and the tongue is a sybil-herald that audibly communicates the real, but inaudible, utterances of a Master, whose innermost shrine is within the convolutions of the brain. A thin vocabulary would make busy the imagination; the virtues and the vices of mankind would be transferred to the brute creation: and our twofold sex would lead us insensibly to categorise all outward inanimate objects under two genders; for, upon close examination, it will be found that a neuter or third gender exists no more in language than in animated nature. As civilization makes progress, it is the way of language to lose terminations, and to gain words. For language is as a sea-shore, and words are its pebbles; if the pebbles be few and far between, they will retain their angularities; if they be clustered in heaps together, they will be rendered by mutual friction monotonously oval.

Abstract words are the latest introduction into human speech; they are the children of high mental culture, the coinage of great brains. They are the nobly ambitious, but necessarily futile, efforts of human

wisdom to express the inexpressible. For truth is as a sun, and human intelligence is as a moon, and abstract ideas are as moonbeams; beautiful exceedingly; but comparatively dim, and altogether, or nearly, devoid of warmth and quickening faculties. The invention of abstract words is the sign of an almost divine intelligence; greater even than that by which Adam named created and visible things; but their inexplicability is the proof of man's weakness, and shows the limits of his faculties. The man almost divine that first peered into the infinity of abstract thought, stood, at the moment of the first conception, upon a higher peak than any peak in Darien, and stared upon a sea deeper and broader and calmer than the Pacific; a sea, however, whose further margin may never be reached by mortal mariner, but only descried, and that dimly, as through a floating mist.

Like as with most other discoveries, the discovery or invention of abstract words has been diverse in its operations. To the minds of the wise they open out, somewhat indistinctly, far-away regions of thought; but on the minds of the vulgar their usage, for a time, tends only to stereotype error. For, as abstract words multiply in a language, the use of metaphor dies away. A savage, who speaks only in metaphor, is a poet only to his civilized hearer; he himself detects intuitively the latent symbol or suggestion; solves, unconsciously, his riddle simultaneously with its propounding. But when the use of, or the necessity for, metaphor waxes rare, this intuitive faculty, excepting with the most highly cultivated intelligences, becomes impaired; and



the preserved allegories of a simple antiquity gradually obtain a literal interpretation, and become the poetry or the superstition or the nursery nonsense of a refined and educated, but piously or timidly conservative posterity.

The various attributes or properties of the sun and moon gave rise to various and special divinities; and ignorance or fancy clothed with a special history, for the former, the names of Zeus, Diespiter, Jupiter, Baal, Apollo, Hêlios, El, Sol, Osiris, On, Hermês, Trismegistus or the Almighty, Mercurius, Phœbus, Vulcan or Tubalcain, Hephæstus, Heraclês, Jânus or Diânus, Dionysus, Bacchus or Iacchus, Perseus, Eurôpa, Tithônus, Adôni, Titân, Hyperion; and for the latter, the names of Jûno or Diûno, Diône, Diâna, Athênê, Phœbê, Lûna or Selênê, Iô, Venus, Hecatê, Astartê or Ashtaroth, Artemis, Aphroditê.

The spread of corn, its underground growth, the ever-recurring deaths and resurrections of the spring and summer flowers are told with an exquisite grace and sweetness in the tale of Ceres, Proserpine, and Pluto.

Iô is a wandering maiden, transformed into a horned cow, and driven round and round the world, watched by the Argus of a hundred eyes, who even in sleep retains one eye open; and Hermês slays the Argus, and the maiden has rest; but the wandering Iô is the restless moon, whose animal type is the pure-white crescent-horned heifer; the hundred eyes of Argu

are the twinkling stars ; and the Day-star is the eye that watches after his companions have fallen asleep ; and the slayer of the Argus is the sun that extinguishes the starlight with his own more effulgent glory.

The amours of Jupiter and the Mountain-Nymphs express in playful and not inelegant terms the condensation of vapour on the tops of great hills and the swelling of waters in the mountain-streams.

Dionysus, the young and beautiful, the Wine-God, the eastern conqueror, marches westwards in triumph with his merry revellers, with the red-faced Silênus, the dancing Bacchants, the tantara of horns, the clash of cymbals, and the roll of drums ; but Silênus typifies the coarser effects of the fermented grape-juice, and Dionysus that magic influence of the same, which cheers the heart of man, loosens the tongue, lends new crimson to the cheek, new brilliancy to the eye, new inspiration to the brain. He is, indeed, an eastern conqueror, for his primeval home was on the northern slopes of the Himalaya, and the traces of his conquests in the western world are still manifest upon the hill-slopes of the islands of the Archipelago, on the hills of Sicily and Italy and Spain and Portugal and Hungary and France, and along the beautiful banks of the Rhine and the Moselle ; and, to this day, whenever we hold the wine-glass betwixt our eyes and the lamp-light, be the contents either simmering, cool champagne, or luscious port, or warming sherry, or soft, silken bordeaux, or red, potent burgundy, or thin, dry asmanshauser, or imperial tokay, still, by their sparkle and their colour

divine, we recognize in them all the children of the Sun-God and the genial Mother-Earth.

Iris, the rainbow, is the sweet messenger of God to man; and Hermès is the conductor of the dead to the subterranean realms of spirit-land. If you will stand upon a shore that looks westward, and watch the sun sink beneath the distant rim, and note the fantastic clouds as they slowly change from deep purple to mingled pink and yellow, and from pink and golden to gray and grayer and still more gray, you have before you the picture that suggested to primeval fancy the descent of the thin, shadowy ghosts after their divine leader into the kingdom of eternal twilight.

The Erinnyes, or the Furies, are three sisters of terrible aspect, with snakes for tresses, and with lashes in their hands, who weary not, night or day, scourging their unhappy victims; the Vulture on Mount Caucasus preys evermore upon the ever-growing heart of Promêtheus; and they are the emblems of Conscience and Remorse, whose offices are alas! known by experience to us all.

The Twin-Brethren, that live and die by turns, enjoying each a chequered immortality, are only stars that rise and set alternately.

The bow-shape of the wandering moon made of Diana a huntress; the rays that penetrate the forest are her nightly arrows; the silvery coldness of the orb clothed the goddess with eternal chastity.

Aphroditê, born of the sea-foam, is either an allegory of the moon-rise over a watery horizon, or, more probably, a blunder in philology.

Apollo slaying the great serpent emblematises the purifying power of sunlight, or of virtue, or of both ; the twelve labours of Herculês are the passings of the sun through the twelve signs of the zodiac ; and Europa on the Bull's back is the round-faced sun entering into Taurus.

Jupiter descended in a shower of gold, and a royal line claimed Danaë as their mythical mother. But Danaë is but an epithet and symbol of the earth ; and the shower of golden sunbeams falls still upon the willing soil ; enriching and fertilizing as in the days of old.

The Isis, whose veil may never be uplifted, and the shifty Prôteus on the ribbed sea-sand are the symbols of Nature, whose secret no wisdom or curiosity will ever resolve, and whose swift subtlety no ken of human intelligence will ever follow.

At a very early period in the world's history, little groups of men, for mutual comfort or protection, would form themselves into tribes under the control of a patriarch or chief. Litigation would be rare and simple ; there would be no written code of laws ; the elders of the people would settle causes of dispute beneath the open sky, and the epigrammatic sentences of the eminently wise would be passed on by pious tradition, and in a century or two every epigram of more than usual sagacity would be referred to some one favourite name. In course of time some one particular chieftain would distinguish himself pre-eminently in war ; by unusual force of character, physical strength, personal prowess, and a native sagacity he would broaden his narrow boundaries ; and would gradually rid himself of the irksome

company of the numerous sons of numerous wives by installing them as chieftains in neighbouring islands or hill-fortresses, or by bestowing on them, severally, a galley with its crew of rowers and willing pirates, a paternal blessing, and an eternal farewell. Such a chieftain would be regarded by subsequent generations as the impersonation of the tribe itself and of all its ramifications, and around his name would cluster all the achievements and better qualities of less conspicuous, less memorable, or less successful heroes. In some such way have been handed down the legendary stories of Hellên, Thêseus, Trôs, Dardanus, Danaus, and other representative but impersonal names.

Again ; long before an image was either cut in wood or carved in stone, before ever a picture was painted of man, animal, or outward nature, the grandest, most suggestive, but most uncopyable of pictures was nightly visible to all. The relative positions of the fixed stars would be noted down for guidance in travelling over land and sea ; the aberrations of inconstant luminaries, many centuries before they could be accounted for by the philosopher, would be observed by the dwellers on extensive plains and high table-lands, by the caravan-travellers of northern Asia, and by the mariners of Sidon and Tyre. By children, by women, by the pious or the fanciful, clustering stars would be grouped into pleasing or terrific forms ; and fantastic forms would lead to fantastic stories, and these stories would be employed, in ways to vary with geographical varieties, to illustrate the history or glorify the apotheosis of some legendary chief.

Again; a tribe emigrating westwards would carry with it, at starting, old poetic and mythological traditions. These traditions would be modified in course of time by the peculiarities of a new geography and the adventures on the way. Some wanderers would pass between the Sea of Ararat and the Caucasus, and strike north-westwards towards the Baltic; others would move in a south-westerly direction, and be lost in Asia Minor; the favourite route would be along the north margin of the Black Sea; and, at distant intervals of time, straggling hordes would descend upon the peninsulas of Greece, Italy, or Spain, and would leave traces of their journey to the north of the Crimea, along the Danube, or among the mountains of the Tyrol.

Each wandering tribe would cherish the worship of one favourite divinity; or from many diverse attributes of a divinity it would select a particular one as typical of its own aspirations. A chance and opportune omen would be taken on the journey from bird or beast or creeping thing; and an eagle, a wolf, a heifer, or a grasshopper would be for evermore sacred to their god, and the crest of their chieftains. The adventures of many wandering years would gather materials for legendary lays, and into these lays would be inserted scraps of old mythological fancy, and the marvellous, but truth-based, yarns of travellers by sea and land. In after ages, the splendid nonsense of heroic achievements would be received unquestioningly by posterity as marks of antiquity and high descent. So, with us, no sensible man would tolerate incredulity regarding St. Patrick and the vermin, St. George and the Dragon, St. An-

drew, or the tale of the Round Table and its chivalrous knights. Meanwhile, some combined expedition, like the Crusades—perhaps, as chimerical in object, as unsystematic in action, as fruitless in direct and obvious result—would leave behind it traditions that would set bards a-singing for a century or two; varying legends would eventually be stereotyped by some pre-eminent poetic genius, and a poetic or religious creed would be fixed and passed on, to endure until old things had faded away, and new things had become old and unintelligible and solemn and divine.

When a swallow prepares for migration at the approach of cold weather, the cautious and economic little creature constitutes itself its own portmanteau and carpet-bag. Hereby, on landing upon a distant shore, it must be saved the worry and expense of portage, which is a terror to all human travellers. In other words, the little bird packs the interstices of his feathers tight and fast with tiny, close-compressed bales of insects. Pigeons, in their voyages, carry in their crops precious cargoes of undigested seeds. These feathery rambles bless, unconsciously, with their visits islands far distant from any mainland, and are the founders of mighty forests, and the scatterers of generations in myriads of insect life. So was it of old with the restless, money-seeking mariners and traders of Sidon and Tyre. By land, they would journey eastwards, and meet, upon the confines of Bactria, the camels that brought gold-dust from the unexplored deserts of the north, or silk and betel-nuts from far distant China, and they would relate, on their return, strange stories concerning the

griffins that guarded, without using, the gold, and the swarms of ants that pursued the robbers of their metallic treasure. From the Red Sea or the Persian Gulf the sailors of Phœnicia would, for outward and homeward voyages, take advantage of the periodic monsoons to visit southern Arabia, Guzerat, the coast of Coromandel and the island of Ceylon, and they would sell in Syria and Egypt, at enormous profit, spices of various kinds, elephants' teeth, wood of the almug-tree, and gaudy-coloured birds and little gibbering monkeys, as pets for the multitudinous inhabitants of royal and princely hareems. They would bring with them also an impalpable freight of yarns regarding perfume-burthened winds, happy islands, strange men, and stranger gods. These busy Syrians cannot rest, for the narrow strip of their own native land offers no field for the development of their ambition; they thread with their galleys the reticulated waters of the Archipelago, explore the dangerous and inhospitable Black Sea, circumnavigate Sicily, pass northwards along the coast of Italy, cross the bay of Genoa, descend by the east of Spain, and finally pass through the Straits of Herculês into unknown and illimitable seas. At Cadiz they open up a splendid trade, and barter toys and gimcracks and glass ornaments for the silver and the lead of inexhaustible mines. Some adventurers will push westwards or southwards to the Canary Islands or along the coasts of Northern Africa; others will, at rare intervals, sail over a stormy bay until they reach the southern coast of Cornwall, and will carry back a freight of invaluable tin. In return for the rich wools, the tin, the



lead, and the silver, which they receive, they will give corn from Egyptian storehouses, or ornaments and cheap jewellery; and, occasionally, to conciliate a great chief, they will leave behind them bright scarlet robes, swords of fine temper, and helmets and shields and cuirasses, curiously inlaid and embossed with emblems unintelligible to the new wearers. These precious articles of costume and armour will pass as heir-looms from father to son; will be given as prizes at funeral games; will be the objects of petty wars; will be worn on solemn occasions; and elaborate descriptions of them will be adroitly inserted into war-ballads, chanted to lute-music by a chieftain's poet-laurcate.

The rowers in the vessels of our Sidonian wanderers will be chiefly kidnapped slaves of Hellas or the Islands or Italy or Sicily; from these they will pick up scraps of non-Semitic dialects, and through them they will scatter in all directions strange and exaggerated stories of whirlpools, and Sirens, and spouting sea-monsters, and Tritons that blow echoing horns, and dragons that guard orchards of golden-rinded fruit, and noisome, bat-like creatures that pounce down upon prepared feasts and rocks that clash together, and happy islands far away in the western seas, that may not be approached, but from which there breathe gales of perfume and may be heard faintly the sounds of music and sweet singing voices. They will also scatter broadcast immemorial tradition of the great Semitic races; but, as they will seldom care to make permanent settlements, these traditions will be taken up by local bards, be incorporated into existing myths, and names and geography will ere long become

so confused as to render thereafter disentanglement very difficult or impossible. Moreover, these earliest missionaries of intelligence, these children of the serpent, will leave here and there a magic and memorable token of their visit; mystic signs; hieroglyphs of a cow's head, a camel's back, or a sea-wave, some sixteen in number; signs gifted with an eternal vitality and miraculous properties; the means whereby speech is arrested, thought stereotyped, and the once flying words of beauty and power caught and impressed with immortality; the symbols that are in time to be the alphabets of every land from Æthiopia to Chaldea and Spitzbergen, and from Mount Libanus to the Bens of Connemara.

Two of the very earliest Greek stories are "The Hunt of the Calydonian Boar" and "The War of the Seven Chieftains against Thebes." Their treatment would be simple and purely Hellenic in character; but it was by some such gradual and complicated process as that above described, that the two greatest of all stories arose, the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey;" the two great streams of incident and fancy, swollen by the scattered rills of a hundred old-world legends; the one, majestically broad and deep, drawn from the depths of ancient Indian mythology, and coloured, but enriched, with the sands of human circumstance; the other, calm and peaceful, welling from the fancies and traditions of Phœnician and Greek sea-lore. These two poems, together with the story of the "Argonauts," form the first great epoch in the story-telling of Western Europe. In early, pre-historic times, the adventures of Jasôn

and his crew of heroes in the good ship *Argô*, the dangers by the way, the magic powers of the enamoured princess, the fire-breathing dragon, and the winning of the Golden Fleece, with other adventures of other voyages real or imaginary, would be told generation after generation in disconnected ballads. There would also through the islands, along the western coast of Asia Minor, through Northern Hellas and the Peloponnese, be a floating capital of war-ballads, which by skilful minstrel could be easily modified to suit the taste or gratify the pride of patron and entertainer for the time being. At some unknown date, a great and pre-eminent genius—for it were a sin to subdivide his entity—would build up all the loose war-songs into one great, stately war-poem, and weld into one continuous story all the traditions and legends of pirate-wanderers and enterprising explorers. Thus in the “*Iliad*” and the “*Odyssey*” the folk-lore of many previous generations would be thoroughly exhausted, and the invention of singers would be at a standstill, until some great historic change should furnish the requisite basis for a poetic superstructure.

For centuries the story-making process became one of disintegration. The tragedies and comedies of ancient Greece are deduced from the two grand arguments; sermons, spun out of texts selected from the twofold Hellenic Bible; but corollaries to the leading propositions; shrines and chapels appended to two grand and towering cathedrals.

For two thousand years blind Homer was sole Emperor of Storyland:—the longest reign on record. His

tributary princes were *Æschylus*, *Sophoclês*, *Euripidês*, and *Virgil*. In enumerating these princes, it is easier to follow chronology than to fix the gradations of their poetic rank. Judged from any point of view, we should probably assign to the versatile *Euripidês* the lowest place among the distinguished four; as a story-teller, *Virgil* will take first rank; had *Æschylus* followed the natural bent of his genius in the direction of lyric verse, he would have shared the palm with *Pindar*; out of some fourscore plays composed by *Sophoclês* only seven are extant, and yet, as a dramatist, he would to this day have held first rank in European estimation, but for the unexpected interference of a notable play-actor in the reign of our Queen Elizabeth.

It is a singular fact, that, of the four above enumerated, it is the Roman *Virgil* that owed most to the direct inspiration of the great Master, but that the sixth book of the "*Æneid*"—which was almost entirely *Virgil's* own, and is superior to anything of similar extent in the "*Iliad*" or the "*Odyssey*,"—was destined in the course of centuries to aid a grand and mighty Florentine in his claim to a share of Storyland sovereignty.

The conquests of Alexander, the diffusion of Greek civilization, the spread of Roman arms and Roman jurisprudence, the growth and establishment of Christianity,—all contributed to diversify the fancy of Europe. Saints and martyrs pushed demigods and heroes off their old pedestals; Jove followed Saturn into eternal banishment; and Pan, with all his merry goat-hooved Satyrs, was consigned to an appropriate *Hadês*.

At length, when Rome had culminated and set, when Paganism had crumbled to pieces, and Christianity was the established religion of the West, in the fulness of time came the *Divina Commedia* of Dante:—

*Tantæ molis erat divinum condere carmen.*

The *Inferno* is a religious poem, due mainly to genuine Christian inspiration, and partly to the genius of Virgil. A few years before the death of Dante, the father of all modern poetry, was born Boccaccio, the first pure writer of Italian prose. The epithet “pure” is due rather to his exquisitely elegant style than to the subject-matter of his stories. Some of these latter were in after days freely plagiarised by our own Chaucer and Shakespeare. Next in order, the authors respectively of the “*Orlando Furioso*,” and the “*Girusalemme Liberata*,” the former story replete with wit and humour and beauty and perplexity; the other, stately and dignified and sculpturesque; the one, the *Odyssey*; the other, the *Iliad* of a dead epoch.

The genius of romance and knight-errantry was stifled and killed by the inextinguishable laughter of Cervantes. The great humourist flourished his magic pen, and the earth, opening, swallowed up enchanted castles, swarthy necromancers, mischievous dwarfs, and amorous giants; and pretty pilgrim-maidens rode their palfreys for ever out of sight into the depths of impenetrable forests; and gay and gallant knights, finding their occupation gone, galloped, with the good taste of gentlemen, on unwearying cock-horses momentarily into limbo.

In English history the day of Bosworth field is the

partition between old things and new. We allow, upon the stage, a helmet and a plume to Richmond in the closing scene of *Richard III*; but our ideas of him as a historic personage are connected with the rise of monarchy, the decline of noblesse, the foundation of a navy, and the growth of commerce. Europe has for a while been covered with a Siberian frost of antiquated and worn-out feudalism; but the spring is setting in with a marvellous swiftness and a force of irresistible expansion, and the ice on every side is cracking with a sound of thunder. The printing-press is revealing the intellectual secrets of ancient civilizations; new keys are in use to unlock the closed treasure-chests of science; bold mariners are doubling the Cape in one way, and doubling the known world in another; and the time is ripening towards the birth of the most universal of all human Makers, the greatest of all great story-tellers.

The native historical plays of Shakespeare are books of our only genuine English epic. The writer is so impressed with the human incident of his stories, that he slurs over descriptions of scenery and details, as a reader is wont to do in the perusal of a modern novel. A book or chapter, as we may term an act or scene, opens with the brief but sufficing explanation: Scene—a heath, a street; Time—midnight, evening; Place—Mantua, Bohemia, Anywhere. In a moment the actors are before us; not a second is lost; fool and courtier and knight and king keep us rapt and listening till the story is told and the curtain drops. In the classical plays of Shakespeare we have, despite of errors in costume, chronology, and geography, more graphic and

true pictures of Roman life and character than are furnished by the best comedies of antiquity. In the imaginative plays we have a web spun by Minerva out of tangled threads of Italian story and simple nursery lore, or out of the richer threads of the poet's own magic spinning.

From the accession of Henry VII. to the death of Elizabeth, monarchy was supreme in England. Its nobility retained the prestige of birth, but their political power was gone. They lent brilliancy to the court, but were no check upon the Sovereign's will. Meanwhile, a class, at first but little feared and less respected, is growing yearly in numerical strength, and gradually broadening its pretensions and objects. For a time, unthinking statesmen would imagine that its members were seeking only some unfeasible and chimerical form of church government; were careless of state and commerce, and intent only upon the realization of a Biblical Utopia. But towards the close of Elizabeth's reign, it is becoming manifest that these men, though marching towards a spiritual Zion, can halt betimes, and do battle for the restriction of royal prerogative and the extension of secular liberty. The capricious but great and autocratic Queen is succeeded by a monarch of extensive but impracticable learning, who grasps convulsively a sceptre too heavy for his feeble and irresolute hand. No longer an obscure and despised sect, the Puritans are now a power in England. A second Stuart succeeds; a king of cultivated intellect, of refined taste, faithful in friendship, sincere in his religious convictions, and, in looks, as Vandyke shows us, every inch a king. But the traditions of an autocratic dynasty,

the admonitions of an unwise father, the counsels of reckless associates are blinding him to the signs of the times. He has eyes, but cannot see; judgment, but will not understand. In the grand but terrible catastrophe that overwhelmed him, let us turn away our thoughts from questions of political or religious strife, and look only to the æsthetic fruit of this great crisis in our national history.

There is a new comer that claims a place beside Homer and Virgil and Dante and Ariosto and Tasso and Shakespeare. In freshness and breadth of human sympathy he is inferior to Homer; in sweetness and delicacy and taste and pathos to Virgil; in universal intuitiveness to Shakespeare: but he builds up a stately poem, that lacks the horror of the "Inferno," but that equals it in sublimity, and that surpasses it and all other poems or stories in unity of design and grandeur of subject. This story-teller has drawn largely from Italian cisterns old and new, but more largely from the springs of a genuine and native religious earnestness. His religious as well as his political views may have their gloomy and forbidding and even repulsive aspect, but they have also their aspect of stern and fearless and uncompromising manliness. In the "Paradise Lost" we detect the influence of Virgil and of Dante; but the vigour and strength of the great work is breathed into it by the genius of a refined Puritanism. In coming centuries, when religious differences shall have softened down, admiring readers will care little whether Milton were Cavalier or Roundhead, Puritan or Churchman, and will only recognize in him the second in the roll of



England's poet-names, and the seventh in order of the great and imperial story-tellers of the Western World.

Let us pause for a moment, to make a reflection by the way. Our subject seeks to include only such as have told a great continuous story in verse, and therefore excludes such as have written prose alone, or such as were dramatists in the ordinary and limited sense of that term. Otherwise, all the following names would have been drawn into the list we are seeking to form. Between the years 1533 and 1639, dating from the death of the first to the birth of the last mentioned, come the great names of Ariosto, Tasso, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Lope de Vega, Calderon, Corneille, Milton, Molière, and Racine. This was a century—when comes such another?

Since the days of Milton many names have been added to the roll of genius, but to the roll of poet story-tellers have been added only the two names Goëthe and Scott. They were born within a year or two of one another; and within a month or two of one another they died. And here, in passing, I will mention the still more striking coincidence, that Cervantes and Shakespeare, kindred spirits, and the pride respectively of Spain and England, should have died upon the same day. I think Charôn seldom ferried over in his boat such a pair at one crossing.

The earliest works of Goëthe were written in prose, and were filled with a morbid sentimentality that was the passion of the day, but which in our own times is supplemented by other but kindred moral weaknesses. His ballads are in beauty and vigour equal to those of

Scott, and have in addition a subtle charm peculiar to themselves. For my own part, I have seldom read a ballad of the great German without a feeling of mystification at the end, of not unpleasant disappointment, as though the story were not finished, but that the end were overleaf; and finding this latter not to be the case, I have felt as though the writer were conscious of my perplexity, and standing behind a screen, and laughing a low, quiet laugh. Could a great epic poem have been written by a German at all, it could hitherto have been written by Goëthe alone. Not that Germany has failed to produce writers whom the magnitude of such an undertaking would never have appalled; for she can boast of writers who, in prolixity and prolific powers, are surpassed only by the great Lope de Vega of Spain, who wrote 800 dramas, and whose works, if contained in books of 300 pages apiece, would consist of 444 volumes. But universal as was the genius of Goëthe—scientific, philosophic, and observant of the beautiful—he could not achieve either of two impossibilities; invent a story for himself, or raise an unimportant one to the dignity and catholicity of epic requirements. Over dreary centuries of monotonous feudalism and almost unexceptionably worthless literature in his own country, Goëthe looked in vain for the base-work of a great epic, and the subjects alien to his country's history had been anticipatorily treated by other master-hands. He dived, therefore, into the depths of his own consciousness, and with the aid of an old, simple, and hackneyed plot, built up a divine but melancholy story; German

in its details, but catholic in its broad treatment; wherein are portrayed the passion of youth, the trusting innocence of woman—the old, old story,—and the spirit eager for universal knowledge; the curiosities, the doubts, the speculations of an eager, restless, inquisitive, and dissatisfied age, of which he was the majestic type and spokesman.

As a singer, Scott ranks below any of his great predecessors, and below his great German contemporary; but, if his verse be supplemented by his prose, he may put forward even a stronger claim than this latter to a place in the honourable and exclusive fraternity. When Scotland was gradually amalgamating with its southern and richer neighbour; when the descendants of its kings were forgetting Holyrood and Perth; when its nobles were visiting the old land only for occasional pastime; and there seemed a chance that the chivalry of a gallant people would be attested in after days by the dull and unsympathetic pen of the chronicler alone, then arose a singer of songs and a panorama painter, that peopled the glens and hills and valleys of his beautiful country with the life-echoes of half-forgotten generations. The adventurous monarch, the haughty chieftain, the gentle maiden, the lawless borderer, the imperious châtelain, move before us with the costumes, the habits, the speech and thoughts of lifetime. But the sympathies of the great painter are not confined within the bounds of his own dear land or to the noble incidents of her history. Upon his catholic canvas we have cartoons of Crusaders' life in Palestine,\* of warriors' duty in half-conquered Wales, of England's chi-

valry under the Plantagenets, of the court-intrigues of a great French king, of Swiss life on the mountains, of the gallant but vain efforts made to restore the exiled Stuarts, of the revolutionary war of England, of domestic usages in far Northern Thulé, and the court-life of the Greek Empire. The facts of history may be chalked down by the chronicler; the hidden causes of great movements—at the best but indistinctly and uncertainly—may be traced by the philosophic historian: but the spirit, the breath, the aroma, and the perfume of an age can be caught only by the poet-painter or the poet story-teller.

We have now constituted an Order of Genius, more exacting in its requirements, more exclusive in its regulations than the Order of the Garter or of the Golden Fleece or of Maria Theresa; in fact, than any order or society, imperial, monarchical, or republican. The Order contains only nine names; and nine is a sacred number, the number of the Muses; and the great names are Homer, Virgil, Dante, Ariosto, Tasso, Shakespeare, Milton, Goëthe, and Scott; but among the nine, as among the captains of king David, are an unapproachable three—a Greek, an Italian, and a Teuton,—Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare.

Of the illustrious nine, Britain claims three; Shakespeare, Milton, Scott. Milton was steeped in Latin and Italian literature. Scott drew his chief inspiration from the ages of romance and feudalism; and the leading fancies of chivalric romance were very often old classic ideas, coloured in passing through a Christian prism. In reading the description of Flodden in "Marmion," one

cannot but suspect that Scott had lovingly studied Homeric battle-scenes, either in the original or in some English metrical translation. Shakespeare borrowed largely, though indirectly, from the writers of antiquity ; but most directly, and very largely, from the native riches of his own fancy, and the keenness and comprehensiveness of his observation and intuition. He is the Pan of intellect ; had our subject been the "Dramatists of the World," he would have been pre-eminent amid the list that held the names of *Æschylus*, *Sophoclès*, *Euripidès*, *Aristophanès*, *Plautus*, *Calderon*, *De Vega*, *Ben Jonson*, *Corneille*, *Racine*, *Molière*, *Voltaire*, *Goldoni*, *Alfieri*, *Schiller*, and *Goëthe* ; had we been treating of poetry, fanciful, passionate, or philosophic, he would have been enumerated along with *Catullus*, *Ovid*, *Spenser*, *Thomson*, *Keats*, *Shelley*, *Coleridge*, *Byron*, *Wordsworth*, *Goëthe*, *Uhland*, and *Heyne* ; had we been discussing ancient and modern humour, he would have held his pride of place in the company of *Lucian*, *Rabelais*, *Montaigne*, *Le Sage*, *Fielding*, *Smollett*, *Swift*, *Sterne*, *Goldsmith*, *Lamb*, *Richter*, *Thackeray*, and *Dickens*.

It would be a pleasant task—for the writer, if not for the reader—to review briefly the works of such as have achieved more or less of distinction in the field of story-telling, but have failed to attain the blue ribbon of the great art ; to enumerate the long line of western story-tellers, who have said their say with or without the magic aid of rhythm or rhyme ; to have spoken of that venerable gossip-historian, *Herodotus*, who sat down to write a sober history, and gave us volumes replete with

incidental and suggestive information, and hundreds of the most amusing nursery stories; of that portrait-painter of heroes, Plutarch; of that pleasant but irreverent humourist, Lucian; of the witty, fanciful, and versatile Ovid; of the delightful, but far from spotless, Boccaccio; of Homeric, chivalric, noble old Froissart; of the "Canterbury Pilgrims;" of that easy philosopher of the world, Gil Blas; of Bunyan and De Foe; of Parson Adams; of the immortal Vicar of Wakefield; of Uncle Toby; of Tabitha Bramble; of Peter Schlemihl; of Undine and the soul of love's making; of Christabel and the Ancient Mariner; of Tam-o'-Shanter and his haunted ride; of Hawkeye and his Redskin friends; of James' "Darnley;" of Bulwer's "Pelham;" of Marryatt's "King's Own;" of Rip Van Winkle and his long sleep; of Dolph Heyliger; of the poor love-lorn Schoolmaster of Sleepy Hollow; of the "House of Seven Gables;" of the three Mousquetaires, Athos, Aramis, Porthos, and the bold and versatile d'Artagnan; of Consuelo, that most exquisite picture of girlish innocence and genius; of Jane Eyre; of Harry Esmond; Colonel Newcome; sweet, noble little Nell; Tony Weller; Dick Swiveller; Captain Cuttle; and dear, old, lovable, immortal, and inimitable Pickwick. Heaven be thanked for its continuous gift of painters that have lined the gallery of our memories with pictures, some sublime, some noble, some inspiring, some pathetic, and all beautiful. Willingly would I linger in such pleasant company; but the truth is, I have engaged to give you, my reader-guest, a dinner within a limited time, and have detained you so long

over my poorly cooked *pièces de résistance*, that you must rise and quit, perhaps fortunately for yourself, without the wine and the dessert.

In reviewing the works of the nine great masters, we are struck especially with one common attribute of simplicity. Their leading characters are broadly typical, their incidents unforced, their plots simple and natural. In modern times, and of late years especially, we have been accustomed to spurious sentiment, tawdry painting, glaring antithesis, and tiresome circumstantiality in unimportant details. No incident moves us unless it be startling and abnormal; we are wearied with the old-fashioned plots of trouble in the second volume and matrimony in the third. We plunge our heroes into misery and our heroines into crime in a way that would have terrified or disgusted our grandfathers. We rejoice in surprises, and revel in horror. Nightmare and dyspepsia are the presiding spirits of our modern story-telling. Ere long our tastes will grow more coarse and gloomy and horror-loving. We shall be content only with authors that marry their villains to the wrong people, or that hang their heroines by mistake, or that leave at the close of their last chapter a respectable hero on an eternal treadmill.

Our periodical literature is at present teeming with abortive imitators of the two great social novelists of our epoch; they swarm like locusts upon our magazines: it is to be hoped that, in due time, some great popular north-east wind of disgust and satiety will carry the creatures far away into the Atlantic, and drown them in deep waters.

It is a difficult thing, however, to resist altogether a fashion either of thought or costume. When we are in the midst of a great crowd, we are apt to lose our individuality, and to be led along by its impulses. Our only chance of acting wisely and reasonably is to stand apart, and reflect, or seek advice; and to act upon our reflections or the counsel proffered. If it be our desire to escape the mischievous and deleterious influences of modern sensationalism, and to purify our taste with simple and beautiful images; to broaden our sympathies by the study of our complex, many-sided nature; to weaken or eradicate petty and local prejudices by associating with the recorded excellencies of all past times, let the works of the Great Masters be more often in our hands. Let us make of them familiar friends. A mental friendship may beget good moral effects, and, in an age of spurious sentiment and emasculate affectation, we may learn from these incomparable teachers many things concerning MANLINESS, PURITY, SIMPLICITY, and TRUTH.







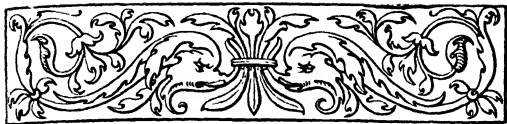
MATTHEW ARNOLD'S POETRY.

BY WILLIAM ALEXANDER, M.A.

DEAN OF EMLY.







## MATTHEW ARNOLD'S POETRY.

**ALTHOUGH** Mr. Matthew Arnold\* may still be called almost a young man, my first acquaintance with his poetry is nearly a quarter of a century old. Some of us must have been present at an Oxford Commemoration in that sweet city, as Mr. Matthew Arnold himself has expressed it—

That sweet city with her dreaming spires,  
Which needs not June for beauty's heightening.

The recitation of the University Prize Compositions is one of the special attractions of that great gathering. At the Commemoration of 1843, the rostrum on the English side, which had been graced on previous occasions by such men as Dean Milman, Heber, the late Earl of Carlisle,

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\* I am happy to have the opportunity of referring to two essays upon Mr. Arnold's Poetry, by the late Mr. William Caldwell Roscoe, in the second of two volumes of *Poems and Essays*, edited, with an exquisitely touching memoir, by Mr. R. H. Hutton.

and Mr. Ruskin, was filled by a scholar of Balliol, Matthew Arnold, son of Dr Arnold, Head Master of Rugby School. Report spoke highly of the performance, an English poem on the subject of one whose memory was then hateful in Oxford—"Nous avons changées tout cela"—Oliver Cromwell. As far as the recitation was concerned, the company was doomed to disappointment. Upon these festal occasions the young men in the galleries of the Sheldonian Theatre amuse themselves with applauding and hissing the objects of their favour or dislike. High above every sound are usually salvos of cheers for the ladies. These cheers were drowned by an explosion of wrath against an unpopular proctor, so savage, and so obstinate, that the proceedings of the day were summarily closed by the retreat of the Vice-Chancellor. The Newdigate Prize Poem was, however, printed. You will allow me to quote its opening lines, which are now, I think, a literary curiosity. They will no doubt remind some of us of one of Wordsworth's noblest sonnets on the two voices of the mountain and of the sea. But they form a singular contrast to the Oxford Prize Poems of the time, which were almost invariably either Heber and water, or Pope and water, beginning with a sunset, or an invocation, and ending, *de rigueur*, with the Millennium and the conversion of the Jews.

High fate is theirs, ye sleepless waves, whose ear  
Learns Freedom's lesson from your voice of fear,  
Whose spell-bound sense, since childhood's hour, hath known  
Familiar meanings in your mystic tone,  
Sounds of deep import, voices that beguile  
Age of its tears, and childhood of its smile.

High fate is theirs, who, where the silent sky  
Stoops to the soaring mountains, live and die;  
Who scale the cloud-capp'd height, or sink to rest  
On the deep stillness of its sheltering breast.  
Around whose feet the exulting waves have sung,  
The eternal hills their giant shadows flung.  
No wonders nursed thy childhood! not for thee  
Did the waves chant their song of liberty.  
Thine was no mountain home, where Freedom's form  
Abides, enthroned amidst the mist and storm,  
Or whispers to the listening winds that swell  
With solemn cadence round her citadel.  
These had no charm for thee—that cold calm eye  
Lit with no rapture as the storm passed by,  
To mark with shiver'd crest the reeling wave,  
Hide his torn head beneath his sunless cave,  
Or hear mid circling crags the impatient cry  
Of the pent winds that scream in agony.

Since 1843, Mr. Arnold has become Professor of Poetry at Oxford. As one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools he has been led to write a volume upon education in France. He has also produced certain trenchant papers which do not exactly flatter Anglo-Saxon vanity, a volume of Essays in Criticism, and four volumes of poetry, with which we are at present concerned.\* Even in England, Mr. Arnold's poetry, with the marked exception of "The Forsaken Merman," and the prayer entitled "Desire," cannot be said to have gained extensive popularity. Here, where we

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\* May I be allowed to express a hope that some of the pieces in the first volume published by Mr. Arnold, "Empedocles on Etna, and other Poems," and which he has withdrawn from subsequent editions, may find a place in a future revision of his poems?

are so much stronger in science than in literature, it is little known. But it seems to stand, in a remarkable way, the mutations of popular taste, rather gaining than losing as time goes on. Its admirers, while they avoid an invidious and damaging comparison with Mr. Tennyson—whose works cover so much a broader canvas, and speak so much more powerfully to the heart, and even to the intellect upon some sides,—yet whisper among the initiated that in Arnold's exquisite sense of form, in the artistic finish of his verse, in the instruments by which he produces his effects, and in the incisive directness of his style, they find something which they miss in the filtered style and occasionally tortuous conceits of the Poet-laureate. For my part, I decline any such comparison. I shall simply endeavour, this afternoon, to bring before you the necessary data for a just estimate of Mr. Arnold's poetry.

The first and great test by which every poet must, in the end, stand or fall, is his power of producing an effect, and leaving a definite impression. The effect must be a permanent one, addressed to permanent principles of human nature. The effect produced by *Childe Harold* was unlimited at the time. It will be long read for its descriptions; but, taken as a whole it was addressed to an ephemeral sentiment, and will not rank among the eternal monuments which are carved out in stone that can never crumble. A poem is not to be judged by isolated ornaments, by details however beautiful, but by the bearing of those details upon the whole effect. In this respect poetry is analogous to oratory. The greatest orators are those of whom it is

nearly impossible to give specimens. Their genius is a soul which dwells in no particular part, but pervades and vivifies the whole mass. Their language is like a blade, which glitters because it is sharp. Lord Brougham has observed that it is as hopeless to give the effects of any oration of Demosthenes by splendid passages, as to produce an adequate idea of the boundless elasticity, the matchless symmetry, the ethereal attitude of the whole Belvidere Apollo by the production of a finger or of an ear.

An eloquent French critic has lately complained of the radical defects of contemporaneous poetry in France.\* Their poets, he tells us, are full of a weak inoffensive egotism. Their poems are reveries, and produce upon us an effect like that of a person who insists upon telling us a dream in a drawing-room. They are pervaded by an affectation of melancholy. Description is the one thing accurately and beautifully done, and it occupies an inordinate space. The rhymes are not fitted to the verses : the verses seem to be written for the sake of the rich and luxuriant ingenuity of the rhymes. Perhaps, in very much of our own poetry, we may trace two at least of these characteristics.

First, the want of a definite aim. Turgid and unnatural language is necessarily adopted to cover over poverty of subject. Of the speaker, of the poet, how often do his admirers exclaim, with upturned eyes, what a style, what expressiveness! The dear man can say whatever he pleases. Very likely; but then the

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\* M. Martha.



dear man has nothing to say. To write even plausible prose, a man must have something to say; to write verse appears in the estimation of many to involve no necessity of the kind. The composer rhymes, as Cimon whistled, for want of thought. The recurrent chink of sounds suggests to him heterogeneous ideas which do not naturally rise from his subject.

Rhymes the rudder are of verses,  
With which, like ships, they steer their courses.

This rudder of rhyme steers the writer on through a dim sea of sounding nonsense. He seems to set out from no place, and to go nowhere in particular. He aims at nothing, and he hits it.

A still more general characteristic of much of our poetry is want of judgment, want of subordination of parts to the whole, and of details to the general effect. In speaking of landscape gardening, Lord Chatham finely said that it required the prophetic eye of taste. He means, of course, the faculty of calling up the scene as it will be under the modifications produced by certain changes, of divining the effect produced by the removal of a tree in one place, and the addition of a tree in another, and of passing judgment upon it as a whole. With this prophetic eye of taste the poet should be able to survey his work, and divine the symmetrical relation of its parts. Of our modern poetry there is no more admirable feature than its description of nature and of scenery. It has been shown by Humboldt, in some of the finest pages of his *Cosmos*, that our modern feelings of reverence, half rapturous, half melancholy, for nature, may be first detected in the

writings of the Christian Fathers. I believe that it would be no difficult task to trace it to a yet more sacred origin, in those words which our common Christendom will never let die. But the fact is certain. Cæsar crosses the Alps; the eternal snow and the mountain glory are unnoticed and unfelt: he whiles away the tedium of the journey by composing a treatise upon grammatical analogy. I say thus much to prove that I am not insensible to the charms of natural description, to Byron's Lake Lemán, or to Tennyson's island in Enoch Arden. But this beautiful adjunct of poetry has usurped a place among us which does not belong to it. Every art has a limit imposed upon it by the materials to which it is restricted. Marble cannot represent the living flexibility of a tree, much less the infinite variety of green in the forest. The musician oversteps the boundary of good sense when he would represent a colour, or a scent. The poet mistakes his art when he vainly attempts to rival the painter by coloured words. He can only introduce in painful succession the objects which the painter can project simultaneously before the spectator. It has been shown by Burke that there are combinations of words which no painter can rival. Suggestiveness, concentration—these are the proofs of a great poet's hand; these are the characteristics of description which painting cannot rival. Keats—

Where the dead leaf fell there did it lie;

Tennyson—

Autumn laying here and there  
A fiery finger on the leaves,

are specimens of this. How many of our poets will sacrifice a thought to a prettiness about the moonlight, or smother it up in a basket of rose-leaves. Mr. Kingsley lately referred to the number and excellence of our poetesses. He seemed to think that the only office left to literary husbands was the amiable task of becoming reviewers of their lady's poems. How far the characteristics to which I have referred are feminine, I shall not attempt to decide.

Indeed, our critical principles seem to be vitiated. When one reads a volume of poems, one exclaims, How exquisite! because the eye falls upon a pretty description of a garden or of a river. There is a picture by an admired painter of the day in a private collection. Its subject is Alfred the Great before a Battle. The king is within his tent; some signs of warfare are in the distance, but the whole foreground of the picture is filled up with hawthorn. Such exquisite minuteness of observation, such accurate delicacy of colouring, such flakes of rosy white that seem to be scented, cannot elsewhere be found. Yet, taken as a whole, the picture has one fault—it is all hawthorn, and no Alfred. Of many poems of the day, written with feeling and talent, the verdict of posterity will be expressed by the French proverb—"The sauce is worth more than the fish."

Mr. Arnold has expressed more strongly than any living writer his conviction that poetic art has its rules; that it is not a chronic anarchy, broken only by the intermittent dictatorships of transcendent genius. He is, therefore, the last man who will complain of being

judged by his own theory. A preacher, indeed, does not always like to be referred to his own sermon; I suppose that it is sometimes awkward for a Parliamentary orator to be contradicted by some pungent sentence from one of his own political works.

Keen are his pangs, but keener far to feel  
He nursed the pinion that impell'd the steel.

I must honestly say that in point of structure and definite aim, Mr. Arnold's poems—except, perhaps, "Balder Dead" and "Sohrab and Rustum"—seem to have fallen far short of his own standard. In "Tristram and Iseult" the package is loosely tied; the framework is weak and vacillating; the third part drags on like a disconnected story. "Merope" is constructed with great skill up to a certain point; but when Merope, about to slay the sleeping Æpytus, discovers that he is her son, shrieking lets the axe drop, and falls insensible, the tide of interest ebbs. We pass on with some degree of weariness, as if to a second story. Mr. Arnold's critics have not without reason said that "Merope" is a melo-drama, not a tragedy.

In subordination as well as finish of details, Mr. Arnold possesses an exquisite tact, which can only be surpassed by the great classical writers. It is a principle of poetical art that everything should in some sense serve for ornament, yet that everything introduced merely for ornament is an error. Beautifully ornamented as is "Sohrab and Rustum," it is questionable whether one detached ornament, pinned on for

its own sake, and impeding the general effect, can be detected in it. For instance:—

As when some hunter in the spring hath found  
A breeding eagle sitting on her nest,  
Upon the craggy isle of a hill lake,  
And pierced her with an arrow as she rose,  
And follow'd her, to find her where she fell,  
Far off;—anon her mate comes winging back  
From hunting, and a great way off describes  
His huddling young left sole; at that, he checks  
His pinion, and with short, uneasy sweeps  
Circles above his eyry, with loud screams  
Chiding his mate back to her nest; but she  
Lies dying, with the arrow in her side,  
In some far stony gorge out of his ken,  
A heap of fluttering feathers: never more  
Shall the lake glass her, flying over it;  
Never the black and dripping precipice  
Echo her stormy scream as she sails by:—  
As that poor bird flies home, nor knows his loss,  
So Rustum knew not his own loss, but stood  
Over his dying son, and knew him not.

And he saw that youth  
Of age and looks to be his own dear son,  
Piteous and lovely, lying on the sand,  
Like some rich hyacinth, which by the scythe  
Of an unskilful gardener has been cut;  
Mowing the garden grass that's near its bed,  
And lies, a fragrant tower of purple bloom,  
On the mown, dying grass:—so Sohrab lay,  
Lovely in death, upon the common sand.

Those who know the poem will have felt that these exquisite passages are not mere purple rags. They bring out more clearly the central aim and interest of the poem—Rustum's unconsciousness that Sohrab is his son.

Of Mr. Arnold's self-restraint in details I may cite

what seems to me a remarkable instance. No faculty has been more abused by many eminent modern poets than that of flower-painting. Every one, indeed, must admire those tender touches with which Virgil—in this respect, too, the first of moderns—has described some flowers in his *Georgics*. No one ever found that picture in *Cœnone* misplaced:—

From the violets her foot  
Shone rosy white.

No one ever wished one colour away from the rich lines in which Milton brings *Paradise* before us, or one flower less in *Perdita's* garland:—

Daffodils,  
That come before the swallows dare, and take  
The winds of March with beauty; violets dim,  
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,  
Or Cytherea's breath—pale primroses,  
Bold oxlips.

But really the horticultural and garden-plot school of poetry has passed the bounds of toleration. Our poets not only show us the anemone trembling like a bridal veil, and the wild rose on its spray shaking to the music of the waterfall; they tumble them in upon us in buckets-full, until we grow angry with the gentle things, and wish to fling them out of the window. The *Flower-Garden* in *Maude* has always been a trial to me. I cannot away with the *pimpernel*. Mr. Arnold is pre-eminently the poet of English flowers. The names which bring before us the finest scents and most subtle colours of our woods and meadows come to him at his will. For instance:—

So, some tempestuous morn in early June,  
 When the year's primal burst of bloom is o'er,  
 Before the roses and the longest day—  
 When garden-walks, and all the grassy floor,  
 With blossoms, red and white, of fallen May,  
 And chestnut-flowers are strewn—  
 So have I heard the cuckoo's parting cry,  
 From the wet field, through the vext garden-trees,  
 Come with the volleying rain and tossing breeze :  
*The bloom is gone, and with the bloom go I.* ♦

Too quick despairer, wherefore wilt thou go ?  
 Soon will the high Midsummer poms come on,  
 Soon will the musk carnations break and swell,  
 Soon shall we have gold-dusted snapdragon,  
 Sweet-William, with its homely cottage-smell,  
 And stocks in fragrant blow ;  
 Roses that down the alleys shine afar,  
 And open, jasmine-muttled lattices,  
 And groups under the dreaming garden-trees,  
 And the full moon, and the white evening-star.

He hearkens not ! light comer, he is gone !  
 What matters it ? next year he will return,  
 And we shall have him in the sweet spring-days,  
 With whitening hedges, and uncrumpling fern,  
 And blue-bells trembling by the forest-ways,  
 And scent of hay new-mown.  
 But 'Thyrsis never more we swains shall see ;  
 See him come back, and cut a smoother reed,  
 And blow a strain the world at last shall heed—  
 For 'Time, not Corydon, hath conquer'd thee.

Well ! wind-dispersed and vain the words will be,  
 Yet, 'Thyrsis, let me give my grief its hour  
 In the old haunt, and find our tree-topp'd hill !  
 Who, if not I, for questing here hath power ?  
 I know the wood which hides the daffodil,  
 I know the Fyfield tree,

I know what white, what purple fritillaries  
 The grassy harvest of the river-fields,  
 Above by Ensham, down by Sandford, yields;  
 And what sedged brooks are Thames's tributaries;

I know these slopes; who knows them if not I?—  
 But many a dingle on the loved hill-side,  
 With thorns once studded, old, white-blossomed trees,  
 Where thick the cowslips grew, and, far descried,  
 High tower'd the spikes of purple orchises,  
 Hath since our day put by  
 The coronals of that forgotten time;  
 Down each green bank hath gone the ploughboy's team,  
 And only in the hidden brookside gleam  
 Primroses, orphans of the flowery prime.

Where is the girl, who, by the boatman's door,  
 Above the locks, above the boating throng,  
 Unmoor'd our skiff, when, through the Wytham flats,  
 Red loosestrife and blond meadow-sweet among,  
 And darting swallows, and light water-gnats,  
 We track'd the shy Thames shore?  
 Where are the mowers, who, as the tiny swell  
 Of our boat passing heaved the river-grass,  
 Stood with suspended scythe to see us pass?  
 They all are gone, and thou art gone as well.\*

It is a singular instance of Mr. Arnold's restraint that he has never given undue predominance to a poetry of flowers.

A second test by which a poet may fairly be judged is his style. Here again Mr. Arnold himself makes us exacting. In pages of excellent prose, where he cuts out his thought as if in marble, with a strong, haughty, careless grace, he has let us know what he thinks of our

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\* "Thyrsis." By Matthew Arnold. Published in *Macmillan's Magazine*, April, 1866.



earliest writers generally. For our prose, Addison's Attic elegance often gilds moral common-places. Jeremy Taylor is a kind of provincial Bossuet. Burke is Asiatic. Jeffrey is superficial, and Macaulay a rhetorician. Mr. Mill is logical and serried, but he knows nothing of the grand style. Our poets do not fare much better at his hands: except the very greatest, they are haunted by an incurable defect of style.

I could wish that Mr. Arnold would devote himself to a special criticism upon Dryden, a subject which Scott and Macaulay have not exhausted. Wanting in tenderness, in natural description, in suggestiveness, in the higher imagination, he is the orator among our poets. He is haunted by no unwearied pursuit of unattainable excellence; yet, at an age when the fire of genius has generally died out, his grandest thought rises before his soul, and shapes itself out in one of the first of English lyrical productions. The finer features of external nature and of the human heart elude his coarse but powerful grasp. His birds are always painted; his summer always fries; his disappointed lovers invariably howl. Perspiration is with him the inseparable adjunct of sunlight and of passion. Yet reason never spoke in language which is clearer, more masculine, or more sonorous, wit never flashed off more cutting antitheses. Compare his best passages with those of Pope; trace the development of an idea in their hands. Pope's music is more accurate, but it is thinner. In Pope the intellectual process is addition; in Dryden, evolution. Pope strings beads; Dryden fuses metal.

From this estimate of English style has arisen Mr. Arnold's craving for something among ourselves analogous to the French Academy. He could sympathize with the enthusiast who proposed that each of his academic brethren should be bound by an oath never to use words which were not to be found in the Dictionary of the Academy. Certainly, in our English freedom from literary authority and tradition, our style has become *specky*. There is no form of verbal heresy which does not lurk in the highest quarters among a people with so much laxity of literary conscience. Take some of the vilest of words: "endorse," "reliable," even "talented," after Coleridge's exposure, are still to be heard from the lips of orators, or seen in the pages of elegant essayists. "Allude to," when a name or point has just been distinctly mentioned; I find it in a letter recently written by the most eloquent of living Englishmen. "Celebrity," in the sense of celebrated person; I myself heard it fall from a literary man of the highest eminence, in a lecture read before the most select audience which England can produce. No shudder ran through the assemblage; I am alive to tell the tale. I can easily believe that some of us will one day hear the following sentence—"Mr. Smith, the talented lecturer to whom I have just alluded, the celebrity who has addressed us, has given us a mass of reliable information which we are ready to endorse." Swift, with his inimitable style—able to carve out a tumour in alabaster, and enshrine putrescence under a crystal case—proposed to Harley the institution of an academy. The project came to nothing, as the ministry

would not give it money. I am not exactly sure whether a scheme for absolutely disabling words from becoming the vehicle of the concealment of thought, for giving to language its ultimate precision and fixity, will find a prominent place in the budget of any Chancellor of the Exchequer.

This laxity and inelegance in the use of language has largely infected our poetry. As of the lower age of Latin literature, so of ours, it may be said, "People only look for that which glares—style is no longer the simple vestment of thought, deriving all its elegance from its perfect proportion with the idea to be expressed." There is a chapter in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* on Frigidity of Diction which deserves to be studied by young poets as well as young orators. Of this frigidity in prose there are four characteristics: compound words; out-of-the-way words; epithets too thickly laid on, and taking the place of thoughts, like the seasoning turned into the food; excessive metaphor. Just as epithets, or brief touches, used by a real orator will be found to be compressed arguments, so those used by a real poet will be found to be compressed descriptions, or situations illuminated by that superior light which genius only can throw around them, and which all the rush-lights of declamation can never give. When Homer compares the eloquence of Nestor with that of Ulysses; when Plutarch tells us that Cato saw that it was time to die, "because the birds began to sing;" when Goëthe represents one about to commit suicide as looking up "to the starry and eternal heavens;" when Virgil shows us the bees led forth *vere suo*, or Orpheus

loses Eurydice *jam luce sub ipsâ*; we feel the difference between declamation and a really great style.\*

In this respect Mr. Arnold holds a very high place among living writers. He despises neither antithesis nor metaphor: but he is without the straining after perpetual metaphor which is the feminine affectation of beauty, and the play of perpetual antithesis which is the masculine affectation of thought. His use of epithets has all the proprieties of which I have spoken. For instance:—

Vain is the effort to forget.  
Some day I shall be cold, I know,  
As is the *eternal moon-lit snow*  
Of the high Alps to which I go:  
But ah, not yet! not yet!

Awhile let me with thought have done;  
And as this *brim'd unwrinkled Rhine*,  
And that *far, purple mountain line*,  
Lie *sweetly in the lock divine*  
Of the slow-sinking sun.

Again, what *curiosa felicitas* in these epithets of the sea, in the well-known lines to “Marguerite:”—

And bade betwixt their shores to be  
The *unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea*.

Once more:—

On winter evenings, when the roar  
Of the near waves came, *sadly grand*,  
Through the dark, up the *drowned sand*.

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\* I must here acknowledge my obligations to M. Martha's article upon Contemporary Poetry in the “Revue des Deux Mondes.”

This perfection of style is a higher merit than is commonly acknowledged. No man can write very well and think very ill. A really good style is like the ocean water, which is blue upon the surface in proportion to the intensity of the saltiness in its depths.

A third point to be examined in any poet, and without which no satisfactory estimate of his merits can be formed, is his versification.

Two different strains of versification are to be found in all our considerable poets, the classical and the romantic. The classical is represented by our heroic blank verse; by heroic rhyming couplets; by what may be called the heroic lyrical music of Collins, Gray, Dryden, and Wordsworth; and by the quatrain employed by Tennyson in the *Dream of Fair Women*. The Spenserian stanza stands between the two schools, while the romantic has for its rhythmical expression all those richly-coloured and undulating measures which seem to respond to the varied moods of our modern life. Our heroic blank verse is the most difficult measure in the language. In ordinary hands it is but mangled prose, verse by right of the eye not of the ear, cheating expectation of the pleasure of a rhyme. Eminent poets have utterly failed to produce it. Thomson's merits are not those of versification; he runs us over ruts, and is always bringing us up with a jerk. Byron's blank verse is tuneless, disfigured by weak endings, and a constant scramble of final dissyllables. Shakespeare's blank verse, with its wavelike music, and its alliterations running on from clause to clause, in its more elevated passages—especially in the *Tempest*—appears to re-

present the utmost beauty which this measure can attain. Milton, and after him, Cowper, Wordsworth, and Tennyson, stand in the next degree. Mr. Arnold may fairly claim his place with these, though his classical horror of dividing the line in the middle sometimes deprives him of variety of cadence. I would refer for proof to "Sohrab and Rustum," especially its closing lines; and to "Balder Dead," especially that matchless description of the burning of Balder's ship in the funeral.

Mr. Arnold's romantic measures are not less exquisitely tuneful. No poet has ever rhymed more carefully than Tennyson. I believe that in all his works but three false or broken rhymes can be found, three identical endings.\* Mr. Arnold's versification is not less careful, and sometimes marvellously felicitous. I must except his Sonnets, the measure of which he seems to have mistaken, and a poem called "Resignation."

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- \* No memory labours lower from the deep  
Gold-mines of thought, to lift the hidden ore,  
That glimpses, rising up, than I from sleep  
To gather and tell o'er  
Each little sound and sight.

In a clear-wall'd city on the sea  
Near gilded organ-pipes, her hair  
Wound with white roses, slept St. Cecily,  
An angel look'd at her.

Evermore

Most weary seem'd the sea, weary the oar.  
Then some one said, "We will return no more."

It would be unjust to forget one praise which must be assigned to Mr. Arnold, that of having absolutely invented a new measure. The Tennysonian octo-syllabic quatrain, naturalized in English by In Memoriam, is to be found in one of Ben Jonson's most beautiful poems. The lyrical blank verse of Mr. Arnold is absolutely his own. I confess that some of his choral songs affect me like the sound of a stick drawn by a city *gamin* sharply along an area railing. For instance, —this from "Merope :"—

Thou confessest the prize  
In the rushing, thundering, mad,  
Cloud-enveloped, obscure,  
Unapplauded, unsung,  
Race of calamity, mine.

An exquisite specimen may be found in "The Youth of Nature," a poem suggested by Wordsworth's death :—

For oh, is it you, is it you  
Moonlight, and shadow, and lake,  
And mountains that fill us with joy,  
Or the poet who sings you so well?  
Is it you, O Beauty, O Grace,  
O Charm, O Romance, that we feel,  
Or the voice which reveals what you are?  
Are ye, like daylight and sun,  
Shared and rejoiced in by all?  
Or are ye immersed in the mass  
Of matter and hard to extract,  
Or sunk at the core of the world  
Too deep for the most to discern?  
Like stars in the deep of the sky  
Which arise on the glass of the sage,  
But are lost when their watcher is gone.

"They are here," I heard  
The murmur of Nature reply—  
"Loveliness, Magic, and Grace,  
They are here—they are set in the world.  
They abide—and the finest of souls  
Has not been thrill'd by them all,  
Nor the dullest been dead to them quite.  
The poet who sings them may die,  
But they are immortal and live;  
For they are the life of the world.  
Will ye not learn it, and know,  
When ye mourn that a poet is dead,  
That the singer was less than his themes,  
Life, and Emotion, and I?"

"More than the singer are these;  
Weak is the tremor of pain,  
'That thrills in his mournfullest chord,  
To that which once ran through his soul.  
Cold the elation of joy,  
In his gladdest, airiest song,  
To that which of old in his youth,  
Fill'd him and made him divine.  
Hardly his voice at its best  
Gives us a sense of the awe,  
The vastness, the grandeur, the gloom,  
Of the unlit gulf of himself.

One other point remains to be examined. Every modern poet who has written enough and well enough to live admits of being philosophically analysed. His general view of existence, his leading ideas, the school of thought to which he belongs, can be definitely ascertained. It is not in studying Wordsworth or Tennyson that we are tempted to forget Aristotle's profound saying, that Poetry is more philosophical than History.

You will understand that I desire to speak with no



polemical asperity of a poet to whom, even morally, we owe two acknowledgments. Like every poet worthy of the name, he has bowed to the soft obligation which Dr. Johnson says has been imposed upon all bards since Petrarch. He has found, or invented, a lady, or ladies, to be loved with all the worship of a poet's heart; but of the delicacy and purity of his strain it may be said, in his own language—

The virgin mountain air  
Fresh through these pages blows;  
And to their leaves the glaciers spare  
The soul of their white snows.

He has also too deep a reverence for faith—at least, as the most beautiful of sentiments—to write intentionally any line that can wound it. Far be it from me, then, to introduce controversial watchwords within the hallowed circle of calm which is wisely drawn round us in this place. But the critic of Wordsworth cannot fail to detect a certain Pantheistic tinge in some of his writings. He notices it without thinking of calling Wordsworth a Pantheist. If I remark that there is a certain influence of Spinoza's special Pantheism upon Mr. Arnold's productions, you need not draw the inference that I accuse the poet of being a Spinosist.

The writings of Spinoza, studied with a fresh interest in our own days, have produced the most opposite impressions. Fénelon, Leibnitz, the seventeenth century generally, denounced him as an Atheist. Jacobi and others have rather regarded him as a mystic drunk with God, and have hailed him as the holy and calumniated Spinoza. Hegel pronounced that it was

necessary for thought to “baptize itself in the sublime ether of the one, universal, impersonal substance of Spinoza.” Goëthe tells us in his autobiography what peace of mind and clearness of ideas came over him from reading the works of that remarkable man. After the example of his master, Goëthe, Mr. Arnold seems to have followed Hegel’s advice. Let me briefly point out some traces of a Spinosist colouring in his poetry.

The leading thought of Mr. Arnold’s poetry appears to be expressed in the words which he has put into the lips of the doomed Egyptian king:—

Austere powers,  
Not God, but ghosts, in frozen apathy—  
Is it that some Power, too wise, too strong  
Ev’n for yourselves to conquer or beguile,  
Whirls earth, and heaven, and men, and gods along,  
Like the broad rushing of the insurgent Nile?  
And the great powers we serve themselves may be  
Slaves of a tyrannous necessity.

Tyrannous necessity, quiet submission to which becomes the duty of duties, seems to be the pervading thought in these poems.

The same feeling is latent in a very beautifully written poem in Mr. Arnold’s earliest volume, which he has withdrawn:—

WRITTEN IN KENSINGTON GARDENS.

In this lone, open glade I lie,  
Screen’d by dark trees on either hand;  
And at its head, to stay the eye,  
Those black-tipp’d, red-boled pine-trees stand.  
The clouded sky is still and grey,  
Through silver rifts soft peers the sun;  
Light the green-foliaged chestnuts play,

The darker elms stand grave and dun,  
 The birds sing sweetly in their trees,  
 Across the girdling city's hum ;  
 How green under the boughs it is !  
 How thick the tremulous, sharp-lines come !  
 Sometimes a child will cross the glade  
 To take his nurse his broken toy ;  
 Sometimes a thrush flit overhead,  
 Deep in her unknown day's employ.

+       +       +       +       +

I, on men's impious uproar hurl'd,  
 Think sometimes, as I hear them rave,  
 That peace has left the upper world,  
 And now keeps only in the grave.  
 Yet here is peace for ever new,  
 When I who watch them am away,  
 Still all things in this glade go through  
 The changes of their quiet day.  
 Then to their happy rest they pass,  
 The flowers close, the birds are fed ;  
 The night comes down upon the grass :  
 The child sleeps warmly in his bed,  
 Calm soul of all things !  
 The will to neither strive nor cry,  
 The power to feel with others give  
 Calm, calm me more : nor let me die,  
 Since I have but begun to live !

Partly, perhaps, from the example of Wordsworth, one of his poetical masters, yet chiefly from this haunting Spinosist view of a God immanent in nature, we can trace an exaggerated estimate of the moral and spiritual teachings of nature in nearly every page. This feeling assumes at times the passionate intensity of a hymn, and seems to set its words to the music of an organ :—

Blow, ye winds ! lift me with you !  
I come to the wild ;  
Fold closely, O Nature,  
Thine arms round thy child.

Ah, calm me, restore me,  
And dry up my tears,  
On thy high mountain-platform,  
Where morn first appears.

Where the white mists for ever  
Are spread and upflung,  
In the stir of the forces  
Whence issued the world.

It is probably this cause more than anything else which has fairly driven Mr. Arnold into the ultra-classical school. The world in which Greek tragedy breathes and has its being, the views of life, and death, and necessity round which it is moulded, meet his instincts and aspirations better than our modern life and the Christian view of it. A Greek tragedy is to him the perfection of poetry. The Hebrews might be Oriental Hurons for all the sympathy which he seems to have with them. The story of Samson he admits to be a noble and dramatic one ; but he refers to it chiefly to complain of Milton's infelicity in not having chosen a tragic story of a more perfect kind. He sees a Greek tragedy as an Athenian might have seen it, to whom when the final words were spoken it stood out in broad sunshine—a model of immortal beauty. He supposes that by dint of possessing himself with a Greek subject, and steeping his mind in Attic sunshine, he may reproduce in the nineteenth century, and in the English lan-

guage, something like Sophocles. If Mr. Arnold finds in himself, as he seems to tell us, a necessity for coming to close quarters with these Greek models, why does he not re-consider the question of translation or paraphrase? After Shelley and Mrs. Browning, Prometheus is still open for another attempt. "No man," says Mr. Arnold, "can do his best with a subject which does not penetrate him; no man can be penetrated by a subject which he does not conceive independently." But when we read Dryden's "Flower and Leaf," do we complain that its writer was not penetrated by his subject? Is our pleasure arrested by the thought that Dryden is, after all, only translating Chaucer? When we compare the original and the reproduction, we can trace the peculiarities of each master. Chaucer's strong picturesque touches are marred in the transfer. For instance:—

The leaves were seen

Some very redde, and some a gladdre lighte greene,

are watered into I know not what pale commonplace. On the other hand, how the old poet's stiff and narrow rhetoric is brightened and made flexible, how the thin metallic tinkling of his lines swells out into a sonorous and majestic music under Dryden's hand. The instance is not exactly apposite; but why should not Mr. Arnold translate Sophocles something as Dryden translated Chaucer, and find time to give us another "Balder" and "Church of Brou?"\*

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\* How essentially Mr. Arnold's imagination has become *fantasy*.

I must notice another instance of Spinosist influence in Mr. Arnold's poetry. I mean his haughty indifference to those distinctions round which poetry twines its finest tendrils. His prose illustrates his verse. We may remember how he brought Mr. Adderley's glorification of the Anglo-Saxon race, and Mr. Roebuck's challenge to history to produce anything like England, face to face with an unhappy infanticide, called Bragg, placed in the lock-up before her trial. Mr. Arnold appears to derive a sublime gratification from the fact that in Ionia and Attica things were different, that on the banks of the Ilissus there was an exemption, not indeed from infanticide, which is a trifle, but from names stamped with such Anglo-Saxon indelicacy as Bragg, Stiggins, and Bugg, names, he adds, with a sigh, appallingly increasing—which is a very serious matter. If in all the world there is nothing like England, the Professor evidently thinks that the world is not much to be pitied. But this sort of indifference makes Mr. Arnold write at an immense disadvantage. The one thing in England which he seems to love is her nature, her lakes and meadows, her woods and flowers, Oxford and Rydal. The musician who despises an instrument will never enrapture us with his performance upon it.

— — — — —  
 and is often painfully seen in his language about death and the dead. Thus in his *Monody on Mr. Clough*, he says—

Bear it from thy loved, sweet Arno vale,  
 (For there thine earth-forgetting eye-lids keep  
*Their morningless and unawakening sleep*  
 Under the flowery oleanders pale).

The poet who almost despises the language in which he sings will scarcely find its finest tones.

I conclude this lecture by saying, with all sincerity, that I commend to you a poet whose writings have been to myself a real source of pleasure. A hundred times over, in hours of lassitude and fatigue, I have taken down these volumes, all too slender as they are. The calm pathos of the "Church of Brou;" the sorrowful and wavelike melody of the "Forsaken Mer-man;" the tragic unity of "Sohrab and Rustum;" have never palled upon me. There are pages which seem to bathe one's mind in the cool breath that blows from English meadows, or in the scent that exhales from the pines of Switzerland. Rarely has love found a tenderer interpreter, or separation breathed a sweeter sorrow. I admit, indeed, that the poet's growth has been stunted by his own theory. He knows so much analytically of his art that his creative powers have been prematurely exhausted. He has studied effect so thoroughly that he has, perhaps, become unable to produce it. His intellect is with the ancients, his heart and talent with the moderns. Yet we find in him qualifications, rare at all times, especially rare at present, finish of detail, music of versification, purity of style. Above all, we find a conscientious abstinence from that sensationalism which begins by corrupting the taste, and ends by corrupting the principles of a nation. I must regret, even upon critical, as well as upon other grounds, that we do not trace in the informing spirit of these volumes a flame which I think might have been grander if it had been kindled at a different altar.



COLERIDGE.

BY THE

RIGHT HON. THOMAS O'HAGAN.









## COLERIDGE.

**W**HEN I proposed to myself to speak to you of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, I was prompted by pleasant memories of earlier days, which had made me somewhat familiar with his writings, and filled me with admiration of his genius. I had not very recently recurred to the fragments of Philosophy and Song bequeathed by him,—poorly representing his own manifold and marvellous endowments, but still sufficient, in their beauty and their power, to fix his impress on the intelligence of every English-speaking people. Preparing to address you, I have glanced through them again, after a long lapse of years, with a renewal of all my old delight and reverence:—but they have affected me with an almost painful sense of the temerity of my endeavour to present, in a lecture such as this, any adequate delineation of the intellectual life and action of one who, more perhaps than any other of his time, might claim the epithet which he made current in our language, and be fitly called a “myriad-

mindèd" man. I can only touch, lightly and imperfectly, under such circumstances, so large a theme; but I may, at least, hope to awaken some useful recollection of the scholar, the thinker, and the poet, whose spirit had long high mastery over the young mind of England, and greatly shaped the current of speculation and the character of literary effort, amongst her foremost men. To the rank and file of the reading public, his history and his works have never been familiar, and, even to an audience such as I address, some reference to them, now that more than thirty years have come and gone since his departure, may not be altogether without novelty and interest.

Coleridge was born in 1772. His father, the vicar and schoolmaster of a parish in Devonshire, seems to have been a simple man, with much classical and scientific reading. He had a large family, and he allowed the youngest of them, of whom I speak, to have very much his own way, and to follow his own fancy. He was, according to his own account, from his earliest boyhood, "a playless day-dreamer, a *belluo librorum*." He read all the books he could procure, and they and his musings on them constituted his enjoyment. He never herded with other children,—never, as he says, "thought as a child or had the language of a child;"—and so much the worse for him it was, in all his after years. But, he was happy in his dreamland. He speaks of his keen delight in the "Arabian Nights;" and putting the question, "Ought children to be allowed to read romances, and stories of giants, magicians, and genii?"—

he answers ; “ I have formed my faith in the affirmative. I know no other way of giving the mind a love for the great and the whole.”

Judge Buller, who was educated by his father, procured for the son a presentation to Christ's Hospital ; and thither he went, and entered on the pursuits, in which his life was to spend itself, at a very early period. Before his fifteenth year, he had plunged into all the mysteries of Metaphysics, and, having a library at his command, he ran through every book, treating of that subject or of theological controversy, on which he could lay his hands. At Christ's Hospital, he formed the friendship with Charles Lamb, “ his dearest, best-loved, and earliest associate,” which never ceased, during their existence. Long after, Lamb celebrated the events of that early period in one of his most charming essays—“ Christ's Hospital, five and thirty Years ago ;”—and thus he describes the “ marvellous boy,” in terms which might not inaptly picture him in his maturity : —“ Come back into memory,” Lamb cries, “ like as thou wert in the day-spring of thy fancies, with hope like a fiery column before thee—the dark pillar not turned—Samuel Taylor Coleridge,—Logician, Metaphysician, Bard ! How have I seen the casual passer through the cloister stand still, entranced with admiration (while he weighed the disproportion between the speech and the garb of the young *Mirandula*), to hear thee unfold, in thy deep and sweet intonations, the mysteries of *Iamblichus* or *Plotinus* (for, even at those years, thou waxed'st not pale at such philosophic draughts), or reciting *Homer* in his Greek, or *Pindar*,

whilst the walls of the old Grey Friars re-echoed to the accents of the inspired charity-boy !”

In after days, Coleridge spoke bitterly of his “preposterous pursuit” of abstruse speculation, at such an age, as having been injurious to his natural powers and the progress of his education. And the lesson of his life, in this regard, is not without its worth ; for there is grievous danger, alike to the faith and the intelligence of the youth who, with untrained faculties and imperfect knowledge, sets himself to consider the great problems which in all ages have puzzled the wisest of mankind, and need to be approached, not with a light audacity or a flippant sciolism, but in the ripeness of thought, and with a solemn sense of responsibility, if we would not run the risk of unsettling all conviction, and substituting, in its place, indifference to the eternal distinctions between truth and falsehood.

Coleridge attributes his escape from destructive consequences, such as these, mainly to the genial influence of poetry, which led him to cultivate “his fancy and the love of nature, and the sense of beauty in forms and sounds.” He became a student of poetry ; and he never ceased to express the admiration with which he regarded the sonnets of Mr. Bowles, and his gratitude for their useful influence on his mind. They appeared in his seventeenth year, and stirred him to such enthusiasm, that he made forty transcriptions of the entire book, in order to present them to his friends, for whom he could not afford to purchase copies. And, till his latest hour, he cherished the sentiment, which he has embodied in one of his sweetest sonnets :—

My heart has thanked thee, Bowles, for those soft strains  
 Whose sadness soothes me, like the murmuring  
 Of wild bees in the sunny showers of spring  
 For hence, not callous to the mourner's pains,  
 Through youth's gay prime and thornless paths I went;  
 And when the mightier throes of mind began,  
 And drove me forth, a thought-bewildered man,  
 Their mild and manliest melancholy lent  
 A mingled charm, such as the pang consigned  
 To slumber, though the big tear it renewed;  
 Bidding a strange, mysterious pleasure brood  
 Over the wavy and tumultuous mind:  
 As the Great Spirit erst, with plastic sweep,  
 Moved on the darkness of the unformed deep.

He entered Cambridge in 1791. He read largely, but irregularly, and gained few collegiate honours; and in 1793, pressed by some pecuniary difficulties, and in a fit of despondency, he enlisted, as a private, in a regiment of Light Dragoons. He took the name of Comberbacke, and his true character was discovered by one of the officers, who found inscribed by him on a stable door:—“*Eheu! quam infortunii miserrimum est fuisse felicem!*” Which I may render in the lines of Tennyson:—

For a sorrow's crown of sorrow  
 Is remembering happier days!

Coleridge ceased to be a soldier after a service of four months: but he never completed his academic course, and soon passed to another field of action.

In 1794, he became acquainted with Robert Southey, and formed relations with that eminent man, which affected, very much, the fortunes of his life. They married sisters, became identified, for a time, in their

views and aspirations ; and contemplated the establishment of a new community beyond the Atlantic, in accordance with notions which were then very prevalent in the world, and which we should now call "socialistic." It was the time, when the French Revolution had shattered down old systems, and brought into question old opinions, and startled the nations by many a fantastic theory, and many an inspiring hope. Men idly dreamed of an impossible equality and a perfect reign of justice ; of the restoration of the "golden time" which knew no poverty or sin ; of a material Paradise and a mundane immortality. Godwin gravely prophesied, in his "Political Justice," that the life of human beings would, at last, be made perennial upon earth ; and Coleridge and Southey proposed to prove, experimentally, on the banks of the Susquehannah, that, in the meantime, and before that probable consummation, they might dispense with the obsolete institution of individual property, and hold all things in common. However, the project had no issue in fact. And although there were joyous evenings, in which, as Charles Lamb said, he sat with his friends at the "Cat and Salutation," reading poetry, and speculating on Pantisocracy, "drinking egg-hot and smoking Oronooko," the enthusiasts never realized their scheme, but remained in England, to help, it may be overmuch, when the glitter of the vision faded and the dark reaction came, the foes of all political and social innovation.

Coleridge then began to lecture ; and those who desire to appreciate his early efforts, in that way, will find specimens of his manner of speech in his "Con-

ciones ad Populum," and "The Plot Discovered;" but on these I do not linger, nor on his abortive attempt to establish the *Watchman*, a journal which endured only for a few weeks. He seems to me to have been unfortunate in attempting, from time to time, to connect himself with periodical literature. His range of vision was too wide, his imagination too teemingly suggestive, his "large discourse of reason" too much conversant with the abstract and the permanent in speculation, to permit of the concentration, the point and the completeness, in narrow space, which must be achieved by the prosperous journalist. Add to this, that his habits were very desultory: that procrastination cursed him through all his life; and we shall not wonder that his *Watchman* failed: that his contributions to the *Morning Post* and *Courier*,—though they were sometimes redolent of the high faculty of which it was, indeed, true to say, *nihil tetigit quod non ornavit*, and though they were much praised by the proprietor of the papers, Mr. Stuart, and gained for those papers increased circulation and popularity,—were yet not very worthy of him; and that the *Friend* itself, abounding in deep thought and noble language, had a brief career, and remains an indigested mass of admirable papers, individually of the highest value, but wanting in continuity and integral effect. Since his day, our periodicals have largely multiplied, and, in the general, greatly improved, and the weekly and daily press now habitually displays a lavish expenditure of intellect and knowledge, which, heretofore, would have built up many a lofty reputation. But I



do not think that, at any time, he could have achieved high distinction in such a field; and we may rejoice that it failed to absorb his energies, and lure them from work to which they were more properly applied.

Two events early tended to draw him towards that work and keep him to it,—his acquaintance with Wordsworth, and the opportunity afforded to him, by the liberality of the Wedgwoods, of becoming well acquainted with the literature, especially the philosophical literature, of Germany.

He first knew Wordsworth in 1794, and they became neighbours in 1797. They formed fit estimates of each other's powers, and soon resolved to unite in a literary venture. They projected the "*Lyrical Ballads*,"—a work which was destined to mark a momentous epoch in the history of English Poetry.

When the first volume of that famous book appeared, in 1798, there was need of the change of which it was the presage. The Poetry which had sprung into being, finding almost at once its birth and its perfection, in the age of Spenser and Shakespeare, had passed through many phases and assumed many forms. It maintained itself with austere dignity during the civil war, and until the overthrow of the Commonwealth, producing minor verses, full of melodious sweetness, and solemn tenderness, and philosophic musing, and making England illustrious as the creator of one of the great epics of the world. But, when the Restoration came, it lost, together, its national character and its power and purity. It subserved the base uses of a licentious Court, and spread a moral pestilence throughout the country.

Even the masculine genius of Dryden, destined to exercise much influence for good, and incapable of utter obscuration and debasement, was made its evil minister. He describes his age in the "Secular Masque"

35—

A very merry, dancing, drinking,  
Laughing, quaffing, and unthinking time:—

And its verse-makers and playwrights, permeated by its spirit, mocked at the true passion and high purpose of the elder days of England. French models were the favourite subjects of imitation, and the form and tendency of intellectual effort were long too largely shaped by them. Even when that effort ceased to be corrupt and morally corrupting; when Addison reached the perfection of grace and ease in prose, and Pope's faultless couplets enshrined the keenest satire, the soundest observation, and the astutest thought: the character of English Poetry was not emancipated from the influences of the seventeenth century. There were wisdom and wit in it abundantly, and, sometimes, great descriptive power; there were artistic endeavour and artistic progress; and there was not wanting appreciation of natural beauty and the working of the human heart, in the environments of an advanced society. All these things there were in the age which produced Thomson, and Young, and Gray, and Collins, and our own Goldsmith, so matchless in many things. But the verse which had these qualities of excellence lacked the large sympathies, the deep emotion, the fresh and loving enthusiasm for the good and the beautiful, the gorgeous imagination, the subtle fancy, and the rich

and various melody, which had belonged to the poets of the past. It has been described as not so much poetic thought as thought "translated into the language of poetry," or as "a translation of prose thoughts into poetic language:" and, though much exception must be made, in behalf, especially, of Gray, and Collins, and Goldsmith, the description does not appear to misrepresent the general character of the rhythmical compositions of the age.

Cowper was near his end before the opening of the career of Coleridge, who associates him and Bowles in the eulogy, that, of the living poets, they were the first "who combined natural thoughts with natural diction—the first who reconciled the heart with the head." In Cowper, and in the greater Scotchman,

Who walked in glory and in joy,  
Behind his plough upon the mountain side,

and approved himself, before his early death, fitted to become a master in every province of the poet's art, that art, in the eighteenth century, fortunately culminated.

The comparative dulness of the time, when Whitehead was Laureate and Hayley had fame, was broken cheerily by the publication of Percy's "Reliques of Ancient English Poetry." The collection appeared in 1765, and their venerable editor, himself of no mean lyrical capacity, saw a great intellectual revolution wrought before his death, at Dromore, in 1811. The "Reliques" gave an impulse and aid of the most material kind to those who heralded a new poetic

era. "I do not think," said Wordsworth, "that there is an able writer in verse in the present day who would not be proud to acknowledgè his obligations to the 'Reliques;—I know that it is so with my friends: for myself, I am happy to make a public avowal of my own." They were a fit prelude to the "Lyrical Ballads;" and they stimulated the early activity of Sir Walter Scott. For, in truth, the "old rude songs," which had been well-nigh forgotten, stirred men's hearts through all the crust of a polished conventionalism, and made them thrill again to the touch of Nature, applied in its simplicity and strength.

'This was one instrument of change: and there were others: but they might all have been impotent to work it, without the aid of the awakening power of that great movement, which, at the close of the century, ran through Europe with electric force, disturbing all that was stagnant, and quickening all that was slow, and evoking to unknown excitement, for evil or for good, the hidden emotions and the slumbering faculties of mankind. That movement was black with crime, and fruitful in suffering and sorrow. It defied Heaven, and spread war and desolation through the earth; but, under God's overruling Providence, it had its "sweet uses," and its happy issues, too.

In the preparation of the "Lyrical Ballads," Coleridge undertook the special romance of the work, and the blending of supernatural machinery with human interest: whilst Wordsworth was to deal with the common objects of physical nature and the ordinary courses of man's life and feeling, developing their deeper mean-

ings, their unappreciated beauty, and their hidden relations with truth and goodness.

Coleridge produced the "Ancient Mariner," and a few other poems, and all the rest of the published pieces belonged to Wordsworth, whose genius never despised the wholesome sustainment of systematic industry, and bore far ampler fruit than that of his co-mate, though the latter may have been more rich in natural gifts, as it was certainly more various, and endowed with a riper scholarship and a wider intellectual vision.

Then came that assault upon the "Lyrical Ballads," which was kept up against their authors, with savage ferocity, for more than twenty years, and will ever be one of the worst reproaches to the critical literature of Britain. The *Edinburgh Review*, in its palmy state, and maintaining a mastery of opinion in the world of letters, set itself to run down Wordsworth, and Coleridge, and Southey, whom it was pleased to class together as forming a single and peculiar school; although not one of those distinguished writers was identified with, or like to, any other, in the conception, the purpose or the mode of execution of his literary enterprises. It is impossible now to read the scandalous diatribes in which they were traduced, and note the utterly unscrupulous partisanship which assailed them, without some disgust, and much astonishment, that persons of undoubted ability could so have prostituted their powers in the effort to cloud the fame, and obstruct the usefulness, of the great men whom, for a generation, they made the subjects of sneering ridicule to the misled multitude

The "Ancient Mariner" of Coleridge was described as "a mixture of raving and drivelling:" his "Christabel" was merely laughed at. And neither the wonderful rhythmical effects, nor the more wonderful power of affluent illustration, nor the deep and suggestive thoughtfulness, of his other poems, could extort, for many a day, a word of commendation from the critical dictators. Southey was equally attacked: and the comparatively few verses in which Wordsworth carried to vicious excess a theory, in many respects, just and defensible, were seized upon, and too long successfully, to make the world forgetful of his transcendent merits. The observation of Coleridge, that the omission of less than a hundred lines from Wordsworth's contributions to the "Lyrical Ballads" would have precluded nine-tenths of the criticism upon them, is unquestionably true. Yet, criticism of the same kind, and having the same small foundation, was sustained, persistingly, for a score of years. The calumniated writers were robbed of the substantial rewards of their high mental efforts, and scouted insolently, when they should have been clothed with honour.

But time went on: a wiser intelligence was diffused; and truth and beauty could not be hid for ever. The revolution in poetic taste which began with the century made its way, slowly but surely. Southey's position became clear and assured; Coleridge, at last, had respect and influence; and Wordsworth survived to see himself the object of universal reverence, and note the proof of his acknowledged power in stamping itself on the language of his country, which has adopted, and

will long cherish, amongst its treasures to be continually applied for current use, a greater number of his lines than of most other poets since the time of Shakespeare. Coleridge was in his five-and-twentieth year when he produced the "Ancient Mariner," and others of his finest compositions. It was his *annus mirabilis*. He had written much and well before, and he wrote nobly afterwards; but the work of that year he never excelled. I have no time to go through his poems in detail; but I am sure many of you are acquainted with them all; and to a few selections from some of them I shall, by-and-bye, ask your attention. Those which succeeded the efforts of his youth are graver and more full of thought, and often of thoughtful melancholy; and though their excellence makes us lament the smallness of their number, they represent, remarkably, the conditions of his mind, at various periods; and, in the absence of any record of stirring events or practical activity,—for his life was exhausted in abstract inquiry and intellectual acquisition,—they are sufficient to compel our homage to the rare genius which produced them.

But, Coleridge was not merely a poet, nor was the cultivation of poetry the main business of his life. His verse is, indeed, instinct with a true philosophy, looking kindly and wisely into nature and life and the heart of man. But he had a double intellectual being; and his speculative faculty, whilst it aided, and was interfused with, his imagination, far transcended it, in his own esteem, and commanded more of his culture and attention.

As I have said, one of the great determining occasions of his life was the visit he was early enabled to make to Germany, and his acquaintance with its metaphysical systems, which followed thereupon. He had been an enthusiastic advocate of the Hartleian theory; but he abandoned it, and, after becoming familiar with Locke, Leibnitz and Des Cartes, he became as familiar with Kant, and Fichte, and Schelling. He had few relations with the work-day world around him. Circumstances sadly detached him, even from the domestic obligations which happily fetter the freedom of the man who governs his own family; and so, from month to month, and year to year, he dwelt in his own peculiar atmosphere of thought and fancy, brooding over the cardinal questions of Metaphysics and Morals, and believing that he had found for them a solution of his own;—“spinning,” as De Quincy said, “from his magical brain theories more gorgeous by far, and supported by a pomp and luxury of images, such as no German that ever breathed could have emulated in his dreams;”—and promising continually the completion of an *Opus Magnum* which should make a new reconciliation of Reason and Revelation, and “justify the ways of God to man.”

And he sought help in these high pursuits from every department of human knowledge; from Natural Science and Universal Literature, from the Fathers of the Christian Church, and the later Platonists, and the Schoolmen of the Middle Age, and the mystic Theosophists, and all the workers in the wide field of modern



speculation. To himself, his own lines may well apply, more than to any other of his time :—

For not a hidden path that to the shades  
Of the beloved Parnassian forest leads,  
Lurked undiscovered by him ; not a rill  
There issues from the fount of Hippocrenes,  
But he had traced it upward to its source,  
'Through open glade, dark glen, and secret dell ;  
Knew the gay wild flowers on its banks, and culled  
Its med'cinable herbs ! Yea, oft alone  
Piercing the long-neglected holy cave,  
The haunt obscure of old Philosophy,  
He bade, with lifted torch, the starry walls  
Sparkle, as erst they sparkled, to the flame  
Of odorous lamps tended by saint or sage !

His knowledge was encyclopædic, and his power of speech had in it, according to contemporary report, something superhuman. He poured out, day by day, the teeming wealth of his imagination and his memory to wondering listeners, who bore it away and made it fruitful, to themselves in fame, and to the world in profit.

William Haslitt hated him, as a politician, and was one of his most virulent assailants in the *Edinburgh Review* ; but, notwithstanding, this was the testimony of that keen-sighted and brilliant, though unhappy man : —“ He is the only person I ever knew who answered to the idea of a man of genius. He is the only person from whom I ever learnt anything. . . . He talked on for ever, and you wished him to talk on for ever. His thoughts did not seem to come with labour and effort, but as if borne on the gusts of genius, and as if the wings of his imagination lifted him from his

fect. His voice rolled on the ear like the pealing organ, and its sound alone was the music of thought. His mind was clothed with wings, and, lifted on them, he raised Philosophy to Heaven." And such was the testimony of all the men of note who came, from time to time, to submit to the witchery of his unmatched eloquence. Professor Wilson wrote:—"If there be any man of great and original genius alive at this moment in Europe, it is Coleridge." "I think," said Dr. Arnold, "with all his faults, old Sam was more of a great man than any one who has lived within the four seas in this generation." And Wordsworth, who was not given to praise, declared that "he had seen many men do wonderful things, but Coleridge was the only wonderful *man* he had ever met."

And so, he sat in his room at Highgate.

'The rapt one, of the godlike forehead,

exercising, in some sort, the intellectual domination which had belonged to Dr. Johnson, or rather, perhaps, to be likened to the sages of the Porch and the Grove, in the great days of Athens, whose disciples hung upon their lips, and garnered up the wisdom which enriched their utterance. He was lavish of his gifts, and indifferent to the profit and the fame he might have won from them. Sometimes, regret for his self-forgetfulness seems to have crossed his mind. He says, sadly, in his "Literary Life:"—"I have laid too many eggs in the hot sands of this wilderness, the world, with ostrich carelessness and ostrich oblivion. The greater part, indeed, have been trodden

under foot and are forgotten. But yet, no small number have crept forth into life, some to furnish feathers for the caps of others, and still more to plume the shafts in the quiver of my enemies, of them that, unprovoked, have lain in wait against my soul—

*Sic vos, non vobis, mellificatis, apes !*”

But, withal, he exercised a greater individual influence than any man of his time; and that influence has penetrated, widely and deeply, the literature of the English tongue, in the Old World and the New.

As I have said, his printed prose works are fragmentary and imperfect, and poorly represent the great intelligence which produced them. The chief of them may be briefly named: “*The Friend*,” the “*Lay Sermons*,” the “*Biographia Literaria*,” the “*Aids to Reflection*,” and the essay “*On the Constitution in Church and State* ;” to which I may add two posthumous publications, the “*Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*,” and the “*Literary Remains*.” These compositions are, in many ways, of rare excellence; but, taken altogether, they leave upon the mind a painful sense of their insufficiency to fulfil the hope which their author cherished, and the world was warranted to share, of some complete achievement worthy of his reputation. With him, unhappily, to project gave no sure promise of performance; as was curiously indicated by his statement to De Quincy, that his title-pages alone (titles of works devised but not executed,) would fill a large volume.

The System of Philosophy, to which he had dedicated his best years, and to which he repeatedly referred as the crowning labour of his life, he never completed; but, after his death, a devoted follower undertook to give it to the world. Mr. Green was a surgeon of high professional rank in London—a Professor in King's College; and a man who had gained great distinction by his Hunterian Lectures and his speculations on subjects connected with mental science. He was conversant with the modern philosophy of Germany, and this, perhaps, led him to seek the society of Coleridge, to whom he became attached, as a pupil to his master. Every week, for many a year, in spite of his absorbing occupations, he spent long hours at Highgate, learning the views of Coleridge from himself; and when their great expounder was no more, he determined, in the words of his own biographer, Mr. Simons, to devote “the whole remaining strength and earnestness of his life to the one task of systematizing, developing, and establishing the doctrines of the Coleridgian Philosophy.” He soon retired from practice, and for eight and twenty years, which remained to him, he chiefly devoted his time and his faculties to the task he had taken on himself. Coleridge had made no full or intelligible demonstration of his system; he left only fragmentary suggestions and notes on margins and in scrap-books; and these, with the memory of the conversations at Highgate, supplied to Mr. Green the materials for his work. In connection with it, we are told that he strove to familiarize himself with every branch of human knowledge, physical and psychological;

that he made a new study of the Greek language ; began, when he was sixty years old, to read Hebrew ; and, when he was older still, tried to make some acquaintance with Sanscrit. He believed, with Coleridge, that a full philosophic system should include “ the laws and explanation of all being, conscious and unconscious ; ” and, with such a conception of it, his labour of construction was, apparently, immense. He died, in 1863, in his seventy-second year, having conscientiously prosecuted that labour to the end ; and, only in 1865, was the result of his faithful and affectionate endeavours given to the public, under the title, “ *Spiritual Philosophy, founded on the Teaching of the late Samuel Taylor Coleridge.* ” The work was edited by his able friend, Mr. Simons, whose preliminary memoir has enabled me to make this statement, as to the origin and progress of the book.

I have made it, not because this is the time or the place to analyze or to judge that remarkable publication ; but because I think it must be of interest to an intellectual audience, to learn that, in this busy century, with all its utilitarian proclivities, and all its proneness to absorb itself in the moiling and toiling of mere material progress, such an exemplar should have been given of reverence and docility and renunciation of selfish ends, by a scholar of high capacity and great acquirements, who, from mere love of what he deemed a sound philosophy, and of its best expositor, spent himself in earnest and humble setting forth of the thought of another man. I institute no foolish parallelism between

the cases, but the conduct of this London surgeon reminds us somewhat of the relation which subsisted between the philosopher whose sublime previsions seemed to anticipate the great doctrines of Revelation, and his master, Socrates. For eight years before an unjust judgment took from Athens her sagest citizen, he had filled with his wisdom a disciple worthy of him, from whose mind, we are told, his image never passed, and who occupied a luminous career, in perpetuating his influence and illustrating his principles. The dialogues of Plato have made the name of Socrates, who bequeathed no written memorial of himself, famous and venerable for all mankind: and it is pleasant to see, in our own day, something of the old Greek devotedness show itself again. To me, at least, there is inspiring nobleness in the spectacle of such strength of purpose and such pure and persistent self-negation, as have been rare in any age, and not least in our own.

I have digressed slightly, but, I trust, not unprofitably. And I scarcely regret, that the digression leaves me no time to talk of some circumstances in the life of Coleridge which ask from us "the charity of silence." Of his slavery, for a time, to the dominion of opium, which poisoned the very springs of his life, and deranged his relations with those who were nearest and dearest to him, and drew from him agonizing cries of self-condemnation, it were not profitable here to speak. Nor is it needful, that I should further dwell upon his want of the prudence, the concentration and the care with which ordinary men utilize, to the uttermost, their meaner

faculties. Often, he pined in his solitary musings,  
when

Fruitless late Remorse would trace,  
Like Hebrew lore, a backward pace,  
Its irrecoverable race!

And in his own rich verse he lamented—

Sense of past youth and manhood come in vain,  
And genius given, and knowledge won in vain;  
And all which he had culled in wood-walks wild,  
And all which patient toil had rear'd \* \* \* but flowers,  
Strewed on his corpse and borne upon his bier,  
In the same coffin, to the self-same grave!

Yet, when he was assailed by critics and in literary circles, as an incorrigible idler, who had wasted his talents and opportunities, he defended himself with natural vehemence, insisting that he had done great work for his generation:—"By what I *have* effected," he says proudly, "am I to be judged by my fellow-men what I *could* have done, is a question for my own conscience." And, then, again would come his hours of despondency, as when, in later years, he wrote thus, in a strain of exquisite sadness:—

All nature seems at work : slugs leave their lair,  
The bees are stirring, birds are on the wing,  
And winter, slumbering in the open air,  
Wears on his smiling face a dream of Spring!  
And I, the while, the sole unbusy thing,  
Nor honey make, nor pair, nor build, nor sing.  
Yet, well I ken the banks where amaranths blow,  
Have traced the fount whence streams of nectar flow;—  
Bloom, O ye amaranths! bloom for whom ye may,  
For me ye bloom not! Glide, rich streams, away!

With lips unmoistened, wreathless brow, I stroll,  
And would you learn the spells that drowse my soul?  
Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve,  
And hope without an object cannot live.

Of his uneventful life, I have no more to say. He passed it in oscillation between the cloudland of his gorgeous fancy and the high, rare atmosphere of speculative thought; and he was not without the comfort of that deep affection, approved by years of tenderness and care, from those who were bound to him by no ties of flesh and blood, for which his yearning found utterance when he said—

To be beloved is all I need,  
And when I love, I love indeed!

He suffered from the want of a definite pursuit or profession to steady his course, and keep his mind from unprofitable wandering. He knew, by sad experience, the truth of Scott's wise saying—"Literature is a good staff, but an evil crutch," and he has done his best, by eloquent and earnest warning, to prevent young men from pursuing authorship, as the business of their lives. I observe that Mr. Carlyle, in his recent Inaugural Address at Edinburgh, repeats the counsel with energy and unction. But I need not dwell upon the causes, in connection with that to which I have last adverted, which produced the mental shortcomings and the bodily afflictions of Coleridge. At last he sank, at the age of sixty-two, broken with pain and many infirmities, but in the unclouded clearness of his majestic intellect, and with the full control of his abounding acquisitions.



And, at the end of all, he wrote to his godson, from his dying bed, these words:—"I, too, your godfather, have known what the advantages and enjoyments of this life are, and what the more refined pleasures which learning and intellectual power can bestow; and, with all the experience which three-score years can give, I now, on the eve of my departure, declare to you (and earnestly pray that you may hereafter live and act on the conviction), that health is a great blessing; competence, obtained by honourable industry, is a great blessing; and a great blessing it is to have kind, faithful, and loving friends and relatives; but that the greatest of blessings, as it is the most ennobling of all privileges, is to be, indeed, a Christian!"

And with this final utterance the greatest thinker of his time went to his account, leaving a memory "which the world will not willingly allow to perish!"

I borrow, as a conclusion to my unworthy outline of an illustrious life, a few of the words which a true poet of our own, Aubrey de Vere, has dedicated to Coleridge:—

No loftier, purer soul than his hath ever  
 With awe revolved the planetary page  
     (From infancy to age)  
 Of knowledge, scrupulous and proud to give her  
 The whole of his great heart for her own sake,  
 For what she is, not what she does, or  
     What can make.

It remains that I should briefly speak of the character of Coleridge, as a philosopher and a poet.

I shall not expound to you his doctrine of Ideas, or

the distinction which it was the labour of all his maturer years to establish between the Reason and the Understanding, as the main foundation of his system, and the key to the truths of Intellectual Philosophy, in its connection with Theology and the grounds of certainty as to spiritual things. Such an exposition of such theories and their consequences, involving the discussion of many a vexed and tangled question, would be impossible in a lecture like this ; even if it were not, as it seems to me, beside and beyond the purposes for which we are assembled. I therefore avoid it : but I shall say a word of the influence on the general character and current of opinion, in his time, which Coleridge so remarkably exerted.

My own views, as to some of the gravest subjects which can occupy the intellect of man, are wholly opposed to those which he energetically advocated, and I deem him often a dangerous guide and counsellor ; but that does not prevent me from recognizing in him a sincere lover of the truth, who pursued it, if not always with success, always, at least, in simplicity and single-heartedness.

And, being so distinguished by mental integrity and purity of purpose, he seems to me, without reference to the minute details of his peculiar teaching, to have been a benefactor to his country, in this, that he sought to lift the speculation of his contemporaries from the dull level on which it had been running, and to inform it with a higher spiritual life. He was no friend to the doctrines of mental science, which, taking their

origin in England, had a fatal development in the godless materialism of France, and, with various modifications, prevailed, more or less, in the schools of Scotland. He became their adversary, when he escaped the fascination of the Hartleian scheme; and the new types of thought, and even of technical expression, which he introduced, were very useful in making men exert their understandings, freely and freshly, and question the necessity of submission to the dominion of the prevailing theories of "sense and selfishness." In all his writings and in all his oral intercourse, he asserted views of man's nature and relations to the universe completely antagonistic to those theories, and his logic and his eloquence encountered them, unceasingly. The thoughtful students of the great English universities, for many a day, looked reverentially to his judgment; and its guidance led very many of them to cherish a high conception of the moral constitution, the freedom and responsibility, and the immortal destiny, of the human race. For the diffusion of such conceptions, at such a time, they and England were deeply his debtors.

Further, his intellectual action always aimed to propagate generous impulses and suggest lofty aims, the disinterested love of truth and virtue, and a large-hearted spirit of love and charity towards all mankind. And, whatever were his own faults and failings, those who followed his counsels were sure to learn the worth and the happiness of conscientious labour, the necessity of method, in the regulation of the intellect and the discharge of social duty, and the sacred obligation, incumbent on every one of us, of acting throughout the

details of life, private or public, trivial or momentous—

As ever in his great Task-master's eye.

In another way, the influence of Coleridge on opinion was of much importance. Before the language of Germany had become familiar, as it now is, to multitudes in these islands, and whilst many of the most learned of their people were still ignorant of the new intellectual development of that country, Coleridge applied himself to the study of the German philosophy, mastered its principles, and measured an intellect, of no unequal power, with those of its chief creators. If he had become its subservient expositor in the English tongue, he would have sapped the foundations of the most cherished beliefs and traditions of his countrymen; or, if he had succeeded such an expositor, he might have found it very difficult to countervail the mischief of a first impression on the national sentiment. But, whilst he made much of the teaching of Kant and Schelling and their compeers familiar in the language of England, he put upon it the impress of his own spirit, and subdued it to the uses of his own deep convictions. He laboured to demonstrate that its doctrines, so far as they were worthy of acceptance, were entirely reconcileable with the dogmas of Christianity—with God's personality and man's redemption; and he anticipated and prevented, to a large extent, the danger of an identification of the new phase of mental science with unbelief, and the substitution of a pantheistic mysticism for the faith of Revelation. •

These were some of the modes in which Coleridge wielded a power, unrecognized and unproclaimed, but not the less real and widely operative, on intellects which were to head the march of thought, and mould opinion by their persuasion and example. In one of his early books, a writer, who has since gained high reputation from a history—distinguished by original research and perverse theory, by a racy and vigorous style, and many a delusive representation of events and persons—makes a striking statement as to his own condition of mind, when he looked out into the world from the cloisters of Oxford, and debated with himself, whether he should follow the path traced for him by John Henry Newman, or that to which he was attracted by Thomas Carlyle? These, it has often seemed to me, with that of Coleridge, are the names representing the exercise of the widest influence, in the most diverse ways, which has acted on individual minds, amongst us, within this century. And it is curious to note, as may be noted by any one who makes a study of the matter, how far the subtle and many-sided intellect of the eldest of the three, in one way, promoted the movement which was led by Dr. Newman with such surpassing power, and, in another, lent to Carlyle much of the energizing force and awakening earnestness which give effect to his peculiar modes of thought. But this is a subject which I cannot pursue, and I refer to it, only because I think it supplies an illustration of the sort of connection which Coleridge has had, with very various phases of the mind of his country.

I must hasten on to make brief reference to the

poetry of Coleridge. Before I do so, permit me to offer to you two short specimens of his prose, with which, perhaps, you may be less familiar. They are, in my judgment, two of the noblest passages which enrich the English tongue. The first I take from his essay "On Method, in the Will and the Understanding," one of the most precious of the fragments he has left behind:—

"Our discussion, however, is confined to method as employed in the formation of the understanding, and in the constructions of science and literature. It would, indeed, be superfluous to attempt a proof of its importance in the business and economy of active or domestic life. From the cotter's hearth or the workshop of the artizan to the palace or the arsenal, the first merit, that which admits neither substitute nor equivalent, is, that *every* thing is in its place. Where this charm is wanting, every other merit either loses its name, or becomes an additional ground of accusation and regret. Of one by whom it is eminently possessed, we say, proverbially, he is like clock-work. The resemblance extends beyond the point of regularity, and yet falls short of the truth. Both do, indeed, at once divide and announce the silent and otherwise indistinguishable lapse of time. But the man of methodical industry and honourable pursuits does more; he realizes its ideal divisions, and gives a character and individuality to its moments. If the idle are described as killing time, he may be justly said to call it into life and moral being, while he makes it the distinct object not only of the consciousness but of the

conscience. He organizes the hours, and gives them a soul ; and that, the very essence of which is to fleet away, and ever more to have been, he takes up into his own permanence, and communicates to it the imperishableness of a spiritual nature. Of the good and faithful servant whose energies, thus directed, are thus methodized, it is less truly affirmed that he lives in time, than that time lives in him. His days, months, and years, as the stops and punctual marks in the record of duties performed, will survive the wreck of worlds, and remain extant when time itself shall be no more."

That is the first passage ; and the second will be found in his essay "On the Principles of Political Knowledge." It has reference to the nature and the force of law, and it is introduced in connection with a eulogy of Sir Alexander Ball, for whom Coleridge had great reverence, on the occasion of his subjection of a mutinous crew by the controlling power of discipline. He says :—

"An invisible power it was that quelled them, a power which was therefore irresistible, because it took away the very will of resisting ! It was the awful power of law acting on natures pre-configured to its influences. A faculty was appealed to in the offender's own being ; a faculty and a presence, of which he had not been previously made aware—but it answered to the appeal ; its real existence, therefore, could not be doubted, or its reply rendered inaudible ; and the very struggle of the wilder passions to keep uppermost counteracted their own purpose, by wasting in internal contest that energy which before had acted in its entirety on external resistance or provocation. Strength may be met with

strength ; the power of inflicting pain may be baffled by the pride of endurance ; the eye of rage may be answered by the stare of defiance, or the downcast look of dark and revengeful resolve ; and with all this there is an outward and determined object to which the mind can attach its passions and purposes, and bury its own disquietudes in the full occupation of the senses. But who dares struggle with an invisible combatant ? with an enemy which exists and makes us know its existence—but where it is, we ask in vain. No space contains it ; time promises no control over it ; it has no ear for my threats ; it has no substance that my hands can grasp, or my weapons find vulnerable ; it commands and cannot be commanded ; it acts and is insusceptible of my re-action ; the more I strive to subdue it, the more am I compelled to think of it, and the more I think of it, the more do I find it to possess a reality out of myself, and not to be a phantom of my own imagination ; that all, but the most abandoned men, acknowledge its authority, and that the whole strength and majesty of my country are pledged to support it ; and yet that for me its power is the same with that of my own permanent self, and that all the choice, which is permitted to me consists in having it for my guardian angel or my avenging fiend ! This is the spirit of law ! the lute of Amphion, the harp of Orpheus ! This is the true necessity, which compels man into the social state, now and always, by a still-beginning, never-ceasing force of moral cohesion.”

That is the second passage ; and I repeat, as to both, that the language contains few which surpass them in majestic solidity of thought, and felicity and true



grandeur of expression. The first clothes with the freshness and impressiveness of an original conception, one of the old truths, which have striven in every household for practical recognition, since human society was formed. What would not Coleridge have accomplished, if his life had illustrated that noble teaching! Of the second, I shall only say, that it is worthy to hold a place, in English literature, side by side with Hooker's famous proclamation of the origin and dignity of law, at the close of the first book of the "*Ecclesiastical Polity*."

And now, I come to speak of the character of the poetry of Coleridge. Much I shall not say of it, for I have already transcended the proper limits of a lecture, and I must employ some of the moments which remain to me, in recalling to your recollection a few illustrations of the various forms of beauty which pervade it. In comparison with others of his time, he wrote very little; and the reason is painfully expressed in his note to the unfinished fragment of "*The Three Graves*:" "*Carmen reliquum in futurum tempus relegatum*." "*To-morrow! and To-morrow! and To-morrow!*" The want of that husbanding of time of which he so well knew the value, of that fruitful method of which he proclaimed the triumphs, made his genius, in verse as in prose, too barren of result; but he did enough to demonstrate its rare quality, and affirm his claim to a place amongst the foremost singers of the world.

I cannot pause to criticise his drama—"Remorse,"—which was successful, and deserved success; or his version of the "*Wallenstein*" of Schiller, which has taken

the very highest rank amongst translations, but was long neglected and profitless to its author; and, as he complains, with some natural bitterness, useful only as supplying "waste paper to the trunk-maker."

Of his verse, in general, it may be truly said, that it exhibited a sweetness, a freedom, and a power of melody, which had been unknown to the later poetry of England. His ear was exquisite, and he had studied profoundly the laws of rhythm; and when he produced the "Ancient Mariner," and the first part of "Christabel," their music came upon the senses of men, like a revelation of the spheres.

The life and passion which were to distinguish the new poetry of the time, needed a new expression, and it was supplied primarily by Coleridge, of whom it has been, I think, truly said, that, whatever may be doubted as to his poetic rank amongst the writers of his age, in other respects, "in versification, at least, he was supreme." And he became so, much from his own fine faculties of "soul and sense," and much, perhaps, from his loving familiarity with the exquisite modulation of the verse of the Elizabethan poets, and the bold and various measures of the young literature of the German people. Be this as it may, the five-and-twentieth year of Coleridge produced compositions of rhythmical excellence, which appear to me perfectly unsurpassed in our language, and to justify this opinion of mine, and, at the same time to indicate something of "the vision and the faculty divine" which possessed him as a poet of the imagination—for the purposes may be well combined—I shall, even at the risk of wearying you with the

*crambe repetita* of things long familiar, read to you a few lines from the "Ancient Mariner," and two or three of his other poems.

I need not tell you the story of the man "who shot the albatross," the bird of good omen, with terrible results to himself and his mess-mates ; and how, after a shuddering confession of his sin, he goes on to describe its consequences, in the becalming of the vessel, and the rotting of the deep, and the coming of the Spectre Ship and the Nightmare, Life in Death, and the perishing of the doomed sailors :—

" With heavy thump, a lifeless lump,  
They dropt down one by one."

But thus the mariner describes his horrid solitude, and the dissolution of the spell :—

Alone, alone, all, all, alone,  
Alone on a wide wide sea !  
And never a saint took pity on  
My soul in agony.

- The many men so beautiful !  
And they all dead did lie :  
And a thousand thousand slimy things  
Lived on ; and so did I.

\* \* \* \* \*

The moving moon went up the sky,  
And no where did abide ;  
Softly she was going up,  
And a star or two beside

Her beams bemooked the sultry main,  
Like April hoar-frost spread ;  
But where the ship's huge shadow lay,  
The charmed water burnt alway, .  
A still and awful red.

Beyond the shadow of the ship,  
 I watched the water-snakes ;  
 They moved in tracks of shining white,  
 And when they reared, the elfish light  
 Fell off in hoary flakes.

•       •       •       •       •

O happy living things ! no tongue  
 Their beauty might declare ;  
 A spring of love gushed from my heart,  
 And I blessed them unaware ;  
 Sure my kind saint took pity on me,  
 And I blessed them unaware.

The self-same moment I could pray ;  
 And from my neck so free  
 The albatross fell off, and sank  
 Like lead into the sea.

And then he tells how the rain came, and how the ship moved on, without a breath of wind, and how his dead comrades rose up, and how their bodies were inhabited by “a troop of spirits blessed :”—

For when it dawned—they dropped their arms,  
 And clustered round the mast ;  
 Sweet sounds rose slowly through their mouths,  
 And from their bodies passed.

Around, around, flew each sweet sound,  
 Then darted to the sun ;  
 Slowly the sounds came back again,  
 Now mixed, now one by one.

Sometimes a-dropping from the sky  
 I heard the sky-lark sing ;  
 Sometimes all little birds that are,  
 How they seemed to fill the sea and air  
 With their sweet jargoning !

And now 'twas like all instruments,  
 Now like a lonely flute ;  
 And now it is an angel's song,  
 That makes the heavens be mute.

It ceased ; yet still the sails made on  
 A pleasant noise till noon,  
 A noise like of a hidden brook  
 In the leafy month of June,  
 That to the sleeping woods all night  
 Singeth a quiet tune.

And, as he concludes his tale, he thus instructs the wedding guest to whom it has been told :—

Farewell, farewell ! but this I tell  
 To thee, thou Wedding Guest  
 He prayeth well, who loveth well  
 Both man and bird and beast.

He prayeth best, who loveth best  
 All things both great and small ;  
 For the dear God who loveth us,  
 He made and loveth all.

I have read so much of a poem which, to me, for many a year, was an ever new delight, because, in its integrity, as I have said, it comes equally in aid of my conception of Coleridge's mastery of rhythm, and in proof of the creative energy of his weird imagination.

“ The Ancient Mariner ” was one of his early poems take one, less known, of his later life—take “ Youth and Age : ”—

Verse, a breeze mid blossoms straying,  
 Where Hope clung feeding, like a bee—  
 Both were mine ! Life went a-maying  
 With Nature, Hope, and Poesy,  
 When I was young !

When I was young ? Ah, woful when !  
 Ah ! for the change 'twixt Now and Then !  
 This breathing house not built with hands,  
 This body that does me grievous wrong,  
 O'er aery cliffs and glittering sands,  
 How lightly then it flashed along ;  
 Like those trim skiffs, unknown of yore,  
 On winding lakes and rivers wide,  
 That ask no aid of sail or oar,  
 That fear no spite of wind or tide !  
 Nought cared this body for wind or weather  
 When Youth and I liv'd in't together.

Flowers are lovely ; Love is flower-like ;  
 Friendship is a sheltering tree ;  
 O ! the joys, that came down\*shower-like,  
 Of Friendship, Love, and Liberty,  
 Ere I was old.

Ere I was old ? Ah woful ere,  
 Which tells me, Youth's no longer here !  
 O Youth ! for years so many and sweet,  
 'Tis known, that Thou and I were one,  
 I'll think it but a fond conceit—  
 It cannot be that Thou art gone !  
 Thy vesper bell hath not yet toll'd ;  
 And thou wert aye a masker bold !  
 What strange disguise hast now put on,  
 To make believe, that Thou art gone  
 I see these locks in silvery slips,  
 This drooping gait, this altered size :  
 But springtide blossoms on thy lips,  
 And tears take sunshine from thine eyes !  
 Life is but thought ; so think I will  
 That Youth and I are house-mates still.

Dew-drops are the gems of morning,  
 But the tears of mournful eve !  
 Where no hope is, life's a warning  
 That only serves to make us grieve,  
 When we are old :

That only serves to make us grieve  
 With oft and tedious taking-leave,  
 Like some poor nigh-belated guest,  
 That may not rudely be dismiss'd.  
 Yet hath out-stayed his welcome while,  
 And tells the jest without the smile.

And now I shall ask your attention to his "Vision in a Dream," of which he says, that, having fallen asleep in his chair, after the perusal of some words about Kubla Khan, in Purchas's "Pilgrimage," he was conscious of composing two or three hundred lines; and that, on awaking, he distinctly recollected the whole, and instantly and eagerly wrote down what I shall read to you. He was then called away by business, and, on his return, after the lapse of an hour, he had forgotten all the rest of the composition of his slumber:—

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan  
 A stately pleasure-dome decree:  
 Where Alph, the sacred river ran  
 Through caverns measureless to man  
                     Down to a sunless sea.  
 So twice five miles of fertile ground  
 With walls and towers were girdled round:  
 And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills  
 Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;  
 And there were forests ancient as the hills,  
 Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted  
 Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!  
 A savage place! as holy and enchanted  
 As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted  
 By woman wailing for her demon-lover!  
 And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,  
 As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,

A mighty fountain momentarily was forced;  
 Amid whose swift half intermitted burst  
 Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,  
 Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail;  
 And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever  
 It flung up momentarily the sacred river,  
 Five miles meandering with a mazy motion  
 Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,  
 Then reached the caverns measureless to man,  
 And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean:  
 And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far  
 Ancestral voices prophesying war!

The shadow of the dome of pleasure  
 Floated midway on the waves;  
 Where was heard the mingled measure  
 From the fountain and the caves,

It was a miracle of rare device,  
 A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!

A damsel with a dulcimer  
 In a vision once I saw;  
 It was an Abyssinian maid,  
 And on her dulcimer she played,  
 Singing of Mount Abora.  
 Could I revive within me  
 Her symphony and song,

'T' to such a deep delight 'twould win me  
 That with music loud and long,  
 I would build that dome in air,  
 That sunny dome! those caves of ice!

And all who heard should see them there,  
 And all should cry, Beware! Beware!  
 His flashing eyes, his floating hair!  
 Weave a circle round him thrice,  
 And close your eyes with holy dread,  
 For he on honey-dew hath fed,  
 And drunk the milk of Paradise.

Undoubtedly, such lines, so composed, are, as they have been called, a "psychological curiosity:" and the



brain must have been "magical" indeed, from which sprung spontaneously, in its passive state, a strain so beautifully wild—so strangely sweet as this.

If I had time, I should remind you of the passages of "Christabel," which charmingly demonstrate the same combination of rich fancy and melodious verse. But I must hurry on. I spoke of Coleridge as a poet of reflection, and I have myself, perhaps, higher admiration for him in that character than in any other. Sir James Mackintosh has somewhere said, that nothing is so easy as to put philosophy into verse, and nothing so difficult as to write philosophical poetry. Any one who will refer to Akenside and Darwin and compare their—in their own way—able and ingenious compositions, with poems such as those of Coleridge, will have no difficulty in understanding the distinction.

Thus he wrote, when he was four and twenty  
 "On leaving a place of Retirement:"—

Ah! quiet dell! dear cot, and mount sublime!  
 I was constrained to quit you. Was it right,  
 While my unnumbered brethren toiled and bled,  
 That I should dream away the entrusted hours  
 On rose-leaf beds, pampering the coward heart  
 With feelings all too delicate for use?  
 Sweet is the tear that from some Howard's eye  
 Drops on the cheek of one he lifts from earth:  
 And he that works me good with unmoved face,  
 Does it but half: he chills me while he aids,  
 My benefactor, not my brother man!  
 Yet even this, this cold beneficence,  
 Praise, praise it, O my soul! oft as thou scann'st  
 The sluggard Pity's vision-weaving tribe!  
 Who sigh for wretchedness, yet shun the wretched,  
 Nursing in some delicious solitude  
 Their slothful loves and dainty sympathies!

IN the "Frost at Midnight," written two years later, there is this address to his little son:—

Dear babe, that sleepest cradled by my side,  
Whose gentle breathings, heard in this deep calm,  
Fill up the interspersed vacancies  
And momentary pauses of the thought!  
My babe so beautiful! it thrills my heart  
With tender gladness, thus to look at thee,  
And think that thou shalt learn far other lore  
And in far other scenes! For I was reared  
In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim,  
And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars.  
But thou, my babe! shalt wander like a breeze  
By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags  
Of ancient mountains, and beneath the clouds,  
Which image in their bulk both lakes and shores  
And mountain crags: so shalt thou see and hear  
The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible  
Of that eternal language, which thy God  
Utters, who from eternity doth teach  
Himself in all, and all things in himself.  
Great universal Teacher! he shall mould  
Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask.

Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee,  
Whether the summer clothe the general earth  
With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing  
Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch  
Of mossy apple-tree, while the nigh thatch  
Smokes in the sun-thaw; whether the eve-drops fall  
Heard only in the trances of the blast,  
Or if the secret ministry of frost  
Shall hang them up in silent icicles,  
Quietly shining to the quiet Moon.

And how beautiful and wise is this reference in "The Nightingale" to the same dear child:—

My dear babe,  
Who, capable of no articulate sound,

Mars all things with his imitative lisp,  
 How he would place his hand beside his ear,  
 His little hand, the small forefinger up,  
 And bid us listen! And I deem it wise  
 To make him Nature's play-mate. ~~He~~ knows well  
 The evening-star; and once, when he awoke  
 In most distressful mood (some inward pain  
 Had made up that strange thing, an infant's dream)  
 I hurried with him to our orchard-plot,  
 And he beheld the moon, and, hushed at once,  
 Suspends his sobs, and laughs most silently,  
 While his fair eyes, that swam with undropped tears,  
 Did glitter in the yellow moon-beam! Well!—  
 It is a father's tale: But if that Heaven  
 Should give me life, his childhood shall grow up  
 Familiar with these songs, that with the night  
 He may associate joy.—Once more, farewell,  
 Sweet Nightingale! Once more, my friends! farewell

'I shall give you but one more extract from these  
 "Meditative Poems." It seems to me delicious in its  
 painting of Nature, and the spirit of calm and purity  
 which breathes throughout it:—

This Sycamore, oft musical with bees,—  
 Such tents the Patriarchs loved! O long unharmed  
 May all its aged boughs o'er-canopy  
 The small round basin, which this jutting stone  
 Keeps pure from falling leaves! Long may the Spring  
 Quietly as a sleeping infant's breath,  
 Send up cold waters to the traveller  
 With soft and even pulse! Nor ever cease  
 Yon tiny cone of sand its soundless dance, &  
 Which at the bottom, like a Fairy's pike,  
 As merry and no taller, dances still,  
 Nor wrinkles the smooth surface of the Fount.  
 Here twilight is and coolness: here is moss,  
 A soft seat, and a deep and ample shade.  
 Thou may'st toil far and find no second tree.

Drink, Pilgrim, here ; Here rest ! and if thy heart  
Be innocent, here too shalt thou refresh  
Thy Spirit, listening to some gentle sound,  
Or passing gale or hum of murmuring bees !

The philosophy with which Coleridge interfuses his sweet or solemn verse is not a thing of dogma or definition ; a descriptive catalogue of physical phenomena ; or an astute discussion of scholastic theories. It is the development of a deeply thoughtful mind and a heart filled with tender and noble feeling, holding close relations with external nature and sensitive to all influences of beauty and grandeur, which are derivable from the physical creation and the deeds and aspirings of mankind. Coleridge is eminently a subjective poet. He looks within ; and seeks

The harvest of a quiet eye,  
Which broods and sleeps on his own heart.

But his poetry is warm with the life of human emotion, and rich in the reflection of the forms and sounds which brighten and glorify the earth around us. It has the luxurious sensuousness of Keats and Tennyson ; but with more of insight, and a truer echo of

The still, sad music of humanity.

It has the wisdom of the verse of Wordsworth. It is sometimes as stately, but never as cold. It rolls with a more melodious fulness, and is instinct with gentler and more genial sympathies. It is, indeed, philosophical poetry, and not philosophy forced into rhythm, and we may well lament, that, being what it is, there should be so very little of it.

Fain would I delight you with portions of Coleridge's "Religious Musings," his "Dejection," his "Fears in Solitude," and of that ode to "France," which Shelley pronounced "the finest of modern times." But it is impossible; and I must despatch most briefly the last section of my subject.

To many, the poems of Coleridge which deal with Love are the most charming and characteristic of his writings. They carry us back across the monotonous dulness of one century and the loathsome impurities which preceded it, to the good days, when, with all their superficial coarseness, the old dramatists of England, and eminently their mighty master—the dramatist of the world and all humanity—dealt with woman's nature, in a spirit of high appreciation and reverential tenderness, and penetrated the mystery of her gentle life, strong in its "magnanimous weakness," and rich in the boundless sacrifices of its unselfish affection. He took his place with them and with their elder brothers of Italian song, who recognized, as one of the highest victories of the Christian civilization, her uprising from her low estate, and helped to make it lasting and spread its holy influence, by exalting her worthiness and adopting, into immortal verse, the chivalric spirit which bowed rude force in proud humility, before its own ideal of grace and loveliness.

"I do not think," said Professor Wilson, "there is any poet in the world who ever touched the mystery of the passion as he has done." And I challenge your approval of that judgment of a gifted critic, whilst I remind you of some verses of the exquisite compo-

sition, so familiar to you all, which is, undoubtedly, the chief adornment and the consummate flower of the love-poetry of Coleridge :—

All impulses of soul and sense  
Had thrilled my guileless Genevieve,—  
The music and the doleful tale,  
    The rich and balmy eve ;

And hopes, and fears that kindle hope,  
An undistinguishable throng,  
And gentle wishes long subdued,  
    Subdued and cherished long !

She wept with pity and delight,  
She blushed with love and virgin shame ;  
And, like the murmur of a dream,  
    I heard her breathe my name.

Her bosom heaved—she stepped aside,  
As conscious of my look she stept—  
Then suddenly, with timorous eye,  
    She fled to me and wept.

She half enclosed me with her arms,  
She pressed me with a meek embrace,  
And bending back her head, looked up  
    And gazed upon my face.

'Twas partly love, and partly fear,  
And partly 'twas a bashful art,  
That I might rather feel, than see  
    The swelling of her heart.

I calmed her fears, and she was calmed,  
And told her love with virgin pride ;  
And so I won my Genevieve,  
    My bright and beauteous Bride.

I could give you passages not unworthy to be classed with this, from other poems, but it is the choicest of

them all; and I cannot venture to detain you further, by the repetition of any more of them. I shall only ask you, before I conclude, to listen to some lines which I should properly have cited when I spoke of the meditative verse, but I have advisedly reserved them, because they have, to me, a peculiar charm, that they may sound latest in your ears, and rest longest in your memories:—

How seldom, Friend! a good, great man inherits  
Honour or wealth, with all his worth and pains!  
It sounds like stories from the land of spirits,  
If any man obtain that which he merits,  
Or any merit that which he obtains.

For shame, dear Friend! renounce this canting strain;—  
What would'st thou have a good, great man obtain?  
Place—titles—salary—a gilded chain—  
Or throne of corses which his sword hath slain?  
Greatness and goodness are not means, but ends!  
Hath he not always treasures, always friends,  
The good great man? Three treasures, love and light,  
And calm thoughts, regular as infant's breath;  
And three firm friends, more sure than day and night,—  
Himself, his Maker, and the angel Death.

The man who could write these things has said of himself—“I have felt, and deeply, that the poet's high functions were not my proper assignment, that many may be worthy to listen to the strains of Apollo, neighbours of the sacred choir, and able to discriminate and feel and love its genuine harmonies, yet not, therefore, called to receive the harp in their own hands, and join in the concert. I am content and gratified that Spenser, Shakspeare, Milton, have not been born in vain; and

I feel it as a blessing, that even among my contemporaries I know one at least who has been deemed worthy of the gift;”—he spoke, of course, of Wordsworth,—“who has received the harp with reverence and struck it with the hand of power.” The self-abasement is strange, and, believing it genuine, we must hold it to be beautiful. It is to me more full of interest than the bold self-admiration and uncompromising self-assertion, which have distinguished some of the greatest poets from the days of Horace to those of Milton and of Wordsworth, and the humility of Coleridge will not make us slower to recognize his genius. “The temple of Fame stands upon the grave—the lights which burn upon its altars are kindled from the ashes of the great;”—and the opinion of his country and the world has redressed the wrong with which evil tongues and perverse judgments too long pursued him, recognizing his full possession of the “high functions” which his own modesty disclaimed.

We may mourn for the opportunities which passed him without improvement, and the moral imperfections which marred his usefulness and darkened his life, and the disproportion of his actual performance to his power and promise. We may refuse to take aspiration for achievement, or confound possibility with fact. But, contemplating all the things of beauty which he has bequeathed, to be “joys for ever” to us and to our children; and all the traditions of his incomparable speech, which had its mission and did its work, though it was spent upon the air, and has been lost to us, for ever; and all the wisdom which may still be



gathered from the imperfect books he has left behind him ; and all his good and worthy service in purifying and spiritualizing the intelligence of England in his day ; we shall cherish with gratitude and reverence the memory of a man whom his own words may most fitly picture,—

The studious poet, eloquent for truth,  
Philosopher, contemning wealth and death,  
Yet docile, child-like, full of life and love !





OLD LETTERS.

BY THE

RIGHT HON. JOSEPH NAPIER.







## OLD LETTERS.

**I**N opening the Second Session of the Afternoon Lectures I directed attention to the high aim and moral purposes of Literature and Art. Lady Richardson, who was one of the intimate friends of Wordsworth, told me that in one of the last conversations which she had with that eminent man, he spoke of the comfort that it was to him that he had never published a line that could offend the purest moral feeling. I think I may at least say as much of our Afternoon Lectures. If the contemplation of whatsoever things are true, and pure, and lovely, belongs to Christian life, then I may, without presumption, add, that we have here given an independent support to morality and religion. There has been no compromise of a sincere conviction; no intrusion of an uncharitable sentiment.

The department of Painting has not, as yet, been dealt with as it deserves. The letters of Edmund Burke to Barry, the addresses of Sir Joshua Reynolds at the Royal Academy, and the eloquent expositions of

Ruskin, show how attractive and how useful this department might be made, and I sincerely hope that the Committee may be able in a future session to supply what is wanting.

In the Vatican there is a happy arrangement of various classes of monumental inscriptions, gathered from the ruins of the Imperial city. We find the tribute of affection in each familiar relation of life, expressed in the tender language of our common humanity. This suggests how published letters might be classified, so as to testify to the identity of human nature. Kings and rulers, statesmen and philosophers, poets and artists, friends and lovers, should all find a place. We might go deeper still into the inner life, and deal with the whole as a distinct section of literature—a part of the interpretation of Nature.

The leading historians of Greece and Rome have given us what they set forth as genuine letters of kings, statesmen, governors, and military commanders. On these I am not disposed to dwell, nor shall I parley with collections the genuineness of which has been more than doubted.

It is with Cicero that letter-writing takes its proper place in literature. He was eminent as a statesman, a scholar, a philosopher, an orator, and a patriot. With a mind of remarkable power and activity, richly cultivated, with a sensitive and a gentle nature, of him it may be said (as of our own Edmund Burke) that nothing in his hands was ephemeral. His comments on passing events, on the lightest things of the time, are stamped with a worth and value for all time. There

is throughout an under-current of thought ; there is a wisdom in his aphorisms, which, combined with felicity and elegance of expression, have made his writings an enduring monument. His friends and select companions were men to whom literature was a delight, and with whom the love of country was a passion. His intercourse with them gave scope to his energetic mind ; and in his familiar letters he gives free play to the influences of natural and homely feeling. “ I always accustom myself” (he says) “ to write my letters in the language of conversation.”

Some of his letters were designed for publicity, but others bear the marks of strictly private communications. That the contents of such were to be regarded as confidential we have his own declaration. “ Who,” says he, “ that is at all influenced by good habits and feelings, has ever allowed himself to resent an affront or injury by exposing to others any letters received from the offending person during their intercourse of friendship ? What else would be the tendency of such conduct but to rob the very life of life of its social charms ? How many pleasantries find their way into letters, as amusing to the correspondents as they are insipid to others, and how many subjects of serious interest which are entirely unfit to be brought before the public ? ”

He was the centre of a correspondence carried on by men of high culture, stirred to the very depth of their souls by the eventful times in which they lived. The influence which he exercised, and the friendships which he retained, bear witness to the character of the man.

His frailties were connected with his peculiar excellence. His mild, philosophic wisdom; his love of literature; his tenderness and private affection; the gentle graces of a nature somewhat timid and pliant, and often irresolute: these were adapted to an age of refined cultivation, rather than to encounter the rude shocks, the wide-spread corruption, and the severe conflicts of the age and the country in which his lot was cast.

Hence it is that we are led to seek him where we find him, in his confidential correspondence. "There is a charm in these letters" (says Mr. Forsyth) "to which we have nothing comparable in all that antiquity has spared us. They have a freshness and reality which no narrative of bygone events can ever hope to attain. We see in them Cicero as he was. We behold him in his strength and in his weakness; the bold advocate, and yet timid and vacillating statesman; the fond husband; the affectionate father; the kind master; the warm-hearted friend. I speak not now of his political correspondence, written with an object in view, and with a consciousness that it might one day be made public, but his private letters to his relatives and friends, in which he poured out the whole secrets of his soul, and laid bare his innermost thoughts, yearning for sympathy, and clinging for support."

Lord Bacon has suggested the variety of occasions to which letters are adapted. In one of those master-touches of wisdom, that condense thought and challenge attention, he says:—"Such as are written from wise men are, of all the words of man, in my judg-

ment, the best; for they are more natural than orations and public speeches, and more advised than conferences or present speeches."

To Cicero we are indebted for the proverbial expression that a letter does not blush. How pregnant with meaning it is! Who has not felt the truth or rather the significance of it, on occasions which occur in life when the privilege of freely committing to paper what we could not bring ourselves to say face to face, has been a relief from painful embarrassment, and taken off a pressure from the heart?

In the correspondence of and with Cicero, we cannot fail to be struck with the yearnings for a better consolation in times of bereavement. When Servius Sulpicius, one of the most accomplished of the friends of Cicero, writes to him on the death of his beloved daughter Tullia, after tender expressions of sympathy, he says:—"How is it that your grief has taken so violent a hold upon you? Consider how fortune has hitherto dealt with us; that those things have been taken from us which ought to be as dear to us as our children—our country, our eminence, our dignity, and our honour. To such a weight of grief can this one sorrow be felt as an addition?"

But before he closes, the thought of the soul's immortality flashes across his mind, and he suggests:—"If there be any knowledge in the departed of what passes here, such was her affection and piety towards you, that she cannot but lament to see you so afflict yourself."

When Cicero writes to Titius on the death of his



son, he says that although among all his friends he was perhaps the least fit to offer consolation, being so large a sharer in his grief as to need consolation himself, he urges a patient submission to what is the very law of our existence. But he adds that what is most calculated to administer consolation is the consideration of the present unhappy situation of our affairs and the sad series of events which cloud the prospects of the republic. The loss of children in a flourishing state of the republic must, he suggests, have been a far heavier affliction. And at last, he says, "If your grief springs from your loving concern for those whose fate you deplore, not to insist upon that of which I have very frequently read and heard, that there is no real calamity in death in which consciousness remains, it being rather an entrance into immortality than the extinction of life; let us remember, on the other hand, that if no consciousness remains, there can be no misery where there is no sensibility."

I have had to make a choice between two modes of treating the subject of *Old Letters*, and the choice which I have made forbids me to linger on the letters of Cicero. It would be an easy task to make a pleasing selection from the letters to Atticus, his bosom friend; and from others which he wrote to those who, depressed by the perils and troubles of the republic, sought in retirement and correspondence a refuge from the distractions of public life. Still more pleasing might be the selection from his private and familiar letters, where the play of feeling is simple and natural, and the genial spirit of this illustrious, good and gentle man is brought

into lively action. He had his faults and his infirmities. But, as Dr. Arnold has justly said of him :—" He died as he had lived, with a reputation of patriotism and integrity ; nor is his life as a citizen stained with anything worse than some mixture of vanity and erroneous judgment, amid many splendid instances of liberality and moderation and wisdom and vigour."

If I must pass from the letters of Cicero, I shall not be tempted by the well-known letters of Seneca or the younger Pliny, excellent and attractive though they undoubtedly are in many respects ; nor shall I delay on the letters of the Fathers of the Church. It was natural for them, widely scattered and separated, yearning for conference, and stirred by meditation, to have recourse to communication by letters. From these might easily be selected noble specimens of enlightened thought and suitable expression. I may refer to one in which there is exhibited in happy combination, loftiness and humility of mind, earnest and chastened feeling, dignified remonstrance, and charitable forbearance. I allude to the reply of St. Augustine to St. Jerome on the controversy which was stirred up between them as to the rebuke of St. Peter by St. Paul.

"Far be it from me to be mortified by your being willing and able to show that you have understood the passage in question from St. Paul, or any other passage of the Sacred Scriptures, more correctly than myself ; nay, far be it from me not to receive the boon with gratitude, if I should gather instruction from your teaching, and improvement from your correction. Truly, my very dear brother, unless you felt yourself

wounded by what I wrote, you would not suppose that I could be wounded by what you wrote in answer. I have always thought too well of your sincerity to doubt of your being really hurt when you write in terms which wounded feelings could alone justify. But if when you do not write to me in this tone, you should deem so ill of me as to suppose it possible for me to be irritated, you would, indeed, wound me by entertaining such thoughts of me."

"I cannot, however, persuade myself that you can be offended with me, unless for having said something which I ought not to have said, or for having said something in a way in which I ought not to have said it. Nor does it appear strange to me that we ourselves should know less of each other's mind from direct intercourse by letters, than from the communications of our familiar and intimate friends, upon whose benevolence and candour, when wearied with the calumnies of the world, I cast myself with entire confidence. For in the charity of my friends I recognize the Divine guidance, and to that guidance I commit myself with a mind devoid of fear and anxiety, while I am fully impressed with the uncertainty which hangs over the events of the morrow, as far as they belong to human fragility. For when I perceive that a man with a bosom glowing with Christian charity has become my faithful friend, whatsoever thoughts or counsels of my heart I confide to such a man, I consider myself as committing them to Him who has made him what he is. God is Love, and whosoever abideth in love abideth in God; and upon the presence or absence of

love in the bosom depends much of the felicity or sorrow of life."

It is interesting to trace the progress of letter-writing from the rude inscription on stone, metal, or wood, to the free flow of the pen and ink on paper. The invention of Printing led to an increased demand for paper; it multiplied readers, and gave an impulse to writing. In Italy, improvement in writing followed in the wake of the general culture of art, and the revival and patronage of literature. To Italy we are indebted for the free and cursive style which was at last introduced into our method of writing. But as to the language of letters, the ambitious attempts at imitating Cicero and others led to exaggeration in expression; the language was unsuitable to the subjects, which were often insignificant and uninteresting. Both in Italy and in France there grew up a mannerism in letter-writing, a style that was unnatural and unmeaning. It ministered to self-conceit and admiration. The letters of the leaders of science, however, possess a peculiar interest, and constitute a distinct class. The confidence of private and unreserved communication protected and preserved a freedom that was vital to the progress of scientific discovery. There are also volumes of the letters of the great painters and artists. The chronicles of these truly great men should be classified with the communications of the men of science, and both classes should be distinguished from a school of letter-writers who were untrue to nature and disloyal to literature.

In the early part of the sixteenth century writing

was a rare accomplishment in England. It was confined to the few and noble. In a book on Agriculture, addressed at that time to the country gentlemen, it was suggested that those who could not write might note down anything they particularly wished to remember, by cutting notches on a stick. The letters of Henry VIII. to Anne Boleyn are now in the Vatican; and in the International Exhibition of 1851 letters from him to Wolsey, from Catharine of Arragon to the king, who was then in France, giving him an account of the victory of Flodden-field; from Anne Boleyn to Wolsey, from Edward VI. and from Mary Queen of Scots, &c. were exhibited. The letter of Her Most Gracious Majesty, Queen Victoria, to Mr. Peabody, puts them all into the shade.

Writing made progress in the reign of Elizabeth, under Roger Ascham, but it is not until the reign of James I. that we find that a claim was made by Bishop Hall of having the honour to introduce in England what he describes as "this new fashion of discourse by epistles, new to our language, usual to others; and as novelty is never without plea of use, more free and more familiar."

In the "Rambler" (No. 152) of 31 August, 1751, Dr. Johnson explains the deficiency in our literature by imputing it to our contempt of trifles and our due sense of the dignity of the public. He proceeds to give some excellent and instructive hints on letter-writing, that indicate his appreciation of its proper purpose, which, in his judgment, was not publicity.

At the end of thirty years after this paper appeared in

the "Rambler," we find him saying, in a conversation recorded by Boswell,—“It is now become so much the fashion to publish letters, that in order to avoid it I put as little into mine as I can.” This was not the case when he contemplated publicity, as in his celebrated letter to Lord Chesterfield.

It was said by one of the greatest of our Judges, that no works have done more service to mankind than letters on familiar subjects, which perhaps were never intended to be published, but that letters which are elaborately written and originally intended for the press are generally the most insignificant, and very little worth any person's reading. And yet all the letters of Goldsmith were written, not merely for publicity, but for sale to the publisher; and publication has often been contemplated when it was not at first intended. The letter of Mr. (now Lord) Brougham to the father of Lord Macaulay on the method to be pursued by his son in order to attain eminence, could scarcely have been intended as a strictly private communication.

In a small but valuable collection of letters published in 1863 by the Earl of Stanhope, the very first, which is a letter from Mr. Pitt to the Duke of Rutland, is marked at the beginning "most private," and has a postscript in these words:—"Be so good as to destroy this letter when you have read and considered it."

It is well that this was not an Irish publication. What a text it might have furnished to the *Times*! It was the contrast which has often impressed me between the genuine letter, written in unreserved confidence, and that which, in the form of a letter to a private man, is

in reality designed for the public ; and the difficulty of selecting from published letters, such as were written without any form of guile and with fidelity to the feelings—in a word, the difference between the natural and the artistic letter, it was this that induced me to follow out a suggestion of Coleridge and make it the subject of this lecture. The suggestion is in the “ Friend.” He says that it does one’s heart good to sit down quietly at times and look over the old letters, which we had carefully put aside and religiously preserved. There is not one of us, I suppose, who has not some such a collection. It is to these unpublished contributions to literature that I mainly desire to call your attention. They minister not to any form of pedantry ; they supply no demand for apt quotation ; and much that is in them is conversant with

the unassuming things that hold  
A silent station in this beauteous world.

Why is it that we feel an instinctive reluctance to destroy some of our letters ? The genuine expression of thought and feeling, kind and natural, has in it somewhat of immortality. We feel that occasions may arise when the heart may long to renew memories and revive sympathies that belong to the innermost life of the soul. The words of kindly advice, of natural affection, of tender sympathy, may come home hereafter with a power intensified by altered circumstances ; they may come as winged messengers from the ends of the earth ; they may speak to us as ministering spirits from a brighter and a better world.

It is the essence of interpretation that it must give in

order to receive. Who can so truly interpret the letter of the lover as the loved one? It is in the complete interchange and the interpenetration of sentiment and feeling, the mutual understanding of each other, and the unreserved allowance of each other, it is in these that the words of the genuine letter find their faithful expositors. The interpreter and the writer are able to change places. Let us then examine our old letters.

“Are you in good earnest asking us to lay aside our books and take to our homely store of old letters, as a part of literature?” Let me answer this question by asking another. You have been familiar with exotic plants and rare flowers; you have conned over the polysyllabic names; perhaps remembered some, or a part of some of them. If I direct your attention to yonder mountain, with its royal robe of purple heath and golden furze, or to some of the inexhaustible combinations of form and colour in nature, to the modest beauty of some graceful plant or simple flower to be found in her open paths or her retired recesses, should you turn away with indifference because you had supposed yourself to be familiar with the rarities of the garden and the conservatory?

I cannot forget the impression made upon me on an occasion when I fell in with a party of naturalists making a tour in the Alps. In riding over one of the passes, in an elevated spot, I saw one of them in advance of his companions; his face beaming with delight as he held up a bunch of wild flowers which he had found on the crest of the mountain. He ran over to me—



merely from a wish  
To impart a joy, imperfect while unshared.

Oh! sir (he said), I have found such a beauty! He pointed out to me its botanical perfectness, and the adaptation of stem and leaf to the mountain climate. It had to him a value at the moment beyond that of the most gorgeous of horticultural prizes.

If you have been diligent students of literature, you are the better fitted to listen to a lesson from the simplicity of nature. Coleridge has commended it, and remember the monitory words of Wordsworth:—

Yes, in these wanderings deeply did I feel  
How we mislead each other; above all  
How books mislead us; seeking their reward  
From judgments of the wealthy few, who see  
By artificial lights; how they debase  
The many for the pleasure of those few;  
Effeminately level down the truth  
To certain general notions, for the sake  
Of being understood at once, or else  
Through want of better knowledge in the heads  
That framed them; flattering self-conceit with words,  
That while they most ambitiously set forth  
Extrinsic differences, the outward marks  
Whereby society has parted man  
From man—*neglect the universal heart.*

If there is one admonition more than another that Sir Joshua Reynolds has enforced in his admirable addresses (as conspicuous for philosophic as for practical wisdom), it is the importance of a frequent recurrence to Nature, to study her processes and note her simplest combinations. If this is true philosophy as to the things that are seen, it is not less true as to those that are not seen—the inner workings of the heart.

Here is a letter from an old schoolfellow. It brings back remembrances that have been fading under the influence of a busy and a restless age, panting for daily novelties and fresh excitement. Old Mortality, with his mallet and his chisel, renewed and deepened the inscriptions which time and the elements had gradually defaced; he revived the memory of the past and renewed a covenant with the future. Years have passed away since you got that letter from your old but not forgotten friend. She may have then taken you into her strictest confidence; told you of her intended marriage, of all the charms of her lover, and all her hopes of happiness. She may have asked you to be one of her bridesmaids, having first given you the incidents of her life at home, and put you in possession of what she has heard of from others of the little circle which were drawn together at school by some principle of natural attraction. How many kindly thoughts, how many happy memories are awakened when, after a lapse of years, in some quiet evening in a pensive mood you reopen the old letter which you could not venture to destroy! Compare this with the reading of some sickly novel filled with exaggerated sentiment or absurd fiction, that helps you not to think and feel that you may know and do, but rather dries up the sources of pure and fresh emotion.

But here is another. It is a letter from a son or a brother far far away; it may be, in the service of his Queen and country. It tells of his many adventures; how he has got on; of his brother officers, and friends who have shown him kindness; and then comes the inquiries about the home he has not forgotten; and the

touches of affection which give to that letter its literary value. Need I suggest the contingencies under which every word that he has there penned may be a power to deepen sympathy and to do good to the heart,—a lesson of nature, bland and benign, teaching with a mother's love rather than a mother's learning?

There is another, which you seem to have carefully preserved. You got it when sorrow darkened the brow and hung upon the heart; its tender words of sympathy came with a gentle and a heavenly influence, like the soft and silent dew. The grief and its solace, thus associated, are indissolubly united; a bow is set in the cloud. That letter is more precious to you than pearl or diamond; it is a gem of the pure literature of the home and the affections. It is emphatically your own. It was meant for you, for you only; it came from some heart of hearts, some loved and loving relative or friend; it bears the stamp of immortality. How easily might I multiply such illustrations! Enough that I suggest to you the train of thought.

Let me go outside this inner circle. Observe in that formal letter, the cold commonplace; the circumspect cautious style. Some public man, who has caught the trick of the diplomatist; afraid to commit himself, and looking ahead to provide that he might not hereafter be embarrassed by a present plainness. You have kept his letter, for the autograph of the writer, or it may be that your wishes and hopes at the time had put upon it an interpretation, which afterwards broke down. It is not without its literary lesson; it teaches you to distinguish the simple freedom of natural affec-

tion and the genial confidence of private friendship, from the non-natural restraint of public or official life. You see that you must interpret each according to its intrinsic character. And you may be led perhaps to think how much the natural language of confidence, seeking to express in simplicity the thoughts and feelings, puts in the shade every form of studied ambiguity or heartless commonplace.

As you turn over letter after letter, do you observe how you are enabled to comprehend much that to others must be unintelligible, or liable to be misinterpreted? How often in the intercourse and collisions of life much is thus misunderstood, much that is redeeming overlooked. We ignore the difficulties which in the very nature of things stand in the way of a true interpretation of motives and conduct; and we forget the divine lesson of charity that thinketh no evil, suffereth long, and is kind.

He only judges right, who weighs, compares,  
And in the sternest sentence which his voice  
Pronounces, ne'er abandons charity.

[Here extracts were read, which were taken from several unpublished letters contained in a manuscript volume belonging to Judge Berwick. Reference was made to the letter of Colonel Mountain as to the education of his daughter, published in the biographical sketch of Colonel M., p. 148, 2nd edition; and also to the letters of Admiral Lord Collingwood to his daughters, published in the "Quarterly Review," vol. 37, p. 393.]

Amongst my own old letters there are many which I

value from both the living and the dead. I have several from my earliest and almost my latest schoolmaster, dear Sheridan Knowles. They contain his genial congratulations on every stage of my advancement (and he survived them all); and his joyous reminiscences of the time when he "first dubbed me as the counsellor—"

When life was young and truant hope was new.

I have others from old college companions—William Archer Butler, Cooke Taylor, and John Whiteside. From men of the olden time, such as Baron Sir W. Smith and Chief Justice Bushe, when after our happy evenings on circuit, in which we had discussed some literary or historic subject, we completed our conferences by correspondence. From Baron Pennefather in his blindness, when the mind lacked not its wonted vigour, and the hand had not altogether lost its power to affix his signature. I believe I have the very last letter which he signed with his own hand. From Mortimer O'Sullivan (never to be forgotten), who first taught me to appreciate the suggestive power and breadth of Coleridge, and the depth and the purity of Wordsworth. From Judge Crampton (one of my most attached and honoured friends), whose cultivated mind found in literature what his spirit found in religion, and his life in charity—an appropriate sphere of active exercise. From the late Bishop of Limerick, Henry Griffin, a choice companion, with high cultivation, a genial spirit and many social qualities; his delightful letters are a part of my literary treasures. I hoard them with a miser's care. The old familiar faces, all are gone!

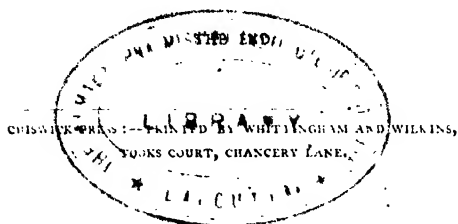
"Where is Bohun? Where is Mowbray? Where's

Mortimer? Nay, which is more and most of all, where is Plantagenet? They are entombed in the urns and sepulchres of mortality."

You can appreciate the motives which have induced me not to refer more particularly to private correspondence. The writer of a letter is entitled to rely on the protection of confidence. Without his consent when he is living, or without the consent of his representative when he is dead, publicity should never take place. It is for the best interests of society that this should be scrupulously and honourably observed. Who would part with or abolish the privilege of familiar correspondence, in which heart speaks to heart without reserve? And how can this be maintained if confidence is to be betrayed at will and pleasure? To those of tender nature, who yearn for the solace or support of sympathy; to those who seek the aid of superior wisdom or of larger experience, and lean upon the arm of a friend, how invaluable is the privilege! How many a fine reflection, how many a suggestive thought might have perished in the birth, without the shelter of a confidential letter!

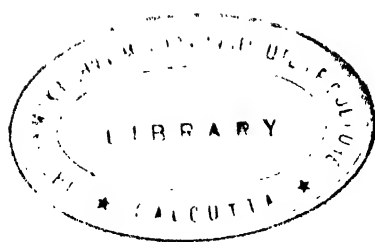
Is it not instructive to look back upon the series of inventions and improvements in century after century, in country after country, by which what was for a long time the luxury of a few, has been changed into the common privilege of the many. Observe the ready means of frequent and distant communication; of the free interchange of thought, and the cherishing of natural affection. Who can reflect on all this without feeling that it has been directed by a purpose and in accordance with a law of Divine beneficence?

“Not by bread alone is the life of man sustained; not by raiment alone is he warmed; but by the genial and vernal inmate of the breast, which at once pushes forth and cherishes. By self-support and self-suffering endeavours; by anticipations, apprehensions, and active remembrances; by elasticity under insult and firm resistance to injury; by joy and by love; by pride which his imagination gathers in from afar; by patience, because life wants not promises; by admiration; by gratitude, which debasing him not when his fellow being is its object, habitually expands itself for his elevation in complacency towards his Creator.” Such was the mild wisdom of Wordsworth. To this store of sustenance every department of literature that is pure, and of art that is chaste, bring their grateful supplies. They are privileged to be the associates of religion. “The king’s daughter has her virgin companions.” They do not solve the mystery of life; they do not satisfy the yearnings of our immortal being. But they impart kindly instruction; they relieve the gloom of life and cheer its solitude. Like the gentle bird of the ark, with a heart for her home with man, and a wing for heaven, they bring from the living freshness of nature a message of gladness and a pledge of peace.











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